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*Intervention work: an ethnography of 'NEET to EET' transitions*

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for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

The thesis examines the practices through which professionals organise interventions with young people who are not in education, employment or training – so-called NEETs. The thesis aims to contribute to a literature on ethnomethodological studies of work by offering a praxiological re-specification of how professionals organise and account for these interventions with cohorts of NEETs. By drawing from ethnographic fieldwork with four groups of professionals and practitioners, the thesis develops the notion of ‘intervention work’ to describe the practical knowledge, skills and methods that are used to organise transitioning young people ‘from NEET to EET’.

The analytic chapters present ethnographic materials drawn from participant and non-participant observation in ‘perspicuous settings’ where professionals put interventions with NEETs into action. The first analytic chapter describes the documentary practices through which employment-related service practitioners deliver a wage-subsidy program and how they make sense of the identity of clients by discussing and documenting troubles. The second chapter focuses on how youth service staff talk about young peoples’ participation on a traineeship program through remarking upon their observed conduct and talk, demographic background, demeanour and appearance. The third chapter examines how local authority staff meet a statutory requirement to regularly produce ‘data returns’ for the Department for Education about the ‘participation status’ of young people. The chapter describes how members display their knowledge and skill about how to reflexively orientate to this data as intelligible. The last analytic chapter explicates how lobbying work is conducted in a membership organisation concerned with the provision of young peoples’ education and skills. The chapter presents materials from regular board and operational meetings about how members of an advocacy group coordinate their activities through making sense of how to

produce ‘institutional products’ with which to conduct and display their lobbying and campaigning work. The empirical content of the thesis includes transcripts of talk-in-interaction, field notes and descriptions of the practical activities through which members made sense of their intervention work on the topic of NEETs. The thesis aims to contribute to a literature on ethnomethodological studies of work and contemporary debates about the implementation of state interventions.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AELP	Association of Employment and Learning Providers
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EET	Education, Employment or Training
EFA	Education Funding Agency
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ERSA	Employment Related Services Association
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Structural Fund
GLA	Greater London Authority
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LEP	London Enterprise Panel
LCCIS	London Client Caseload Information System
NCCIS	National Client Caseload Information System
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
OSG	Operational Sub-Group at London Councils
RPA	Raising the Participation Age
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
YPES	Young Peoples' Education and Skills Board at London Councils

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## ONE. Introduction

This thesis sets out to describe the practical, organisational work involved in the organisation of young people's transitions from being not in education, employment or training – or 'NEET' – into some form of education, employment or training – or 'EET'. This shift in status will be referred to throughout the thesis as 'NEET to EET' transitions. The thesis will examine how these transitions are treated as a practical concern by professionals in different organisational settings. Each of the following analytic chapters seek to provide praxiological descriptions about how these 'NEET to EET' transitions are treated as a routine matter in the work practices of professionals. By doing so, the thesis sets out to specify how professionals orientate to the topic of NEET by organising the implementation of interventions. The thesis draws from ethnographic fieldwork with youth workers, trainers, local authority staff, employment support managers, policymakers, and lobbyists, the practical actions through which these members organise their work to address these transitions.

Over the course of the thesis I advance the notion of *intervention work* to describe these professional practices and how they organise these transitions. I use this notion to collect observations which specify how professionals undertake practical actions in order to put policies into practice. The thesis develops the notion of intervention work to focus upon the practical actions, interactions and reasoning that professionals and members of staff use to implement employment and training interventions. In each of the following analytic chapters I look to describe how members of staff reflexively and practically organise the day-to-day

implementation of government policies, programs and statutory requirements for administering NEET targeting initiatives.

The notion of intervention work contributes to social scientific and social policy literature about the implementation of NEET government policies and programs. Instead of analysing specific government programs in terms of the ‘employment outcomes’ which result, or the effects of ‘conditionality’ in the provision of state benefits, the thesis seeks to offer a detailed focus on the ‘everyday practices’ that professionals use in organisational settings to reflexively orientate to the implementation of policies. Our focus upon everyday practices means that the thesis will draw extensively from an area of the sociological research, namely ethnomethodology. This area of investigation seeks to explicate the practical skills, knowledge, reasoning, interactions and competencies that members of society exhibit in the accomplishment of ordinary activities. The accomplishment of activities can comprise filling in an application form or delivering advice in a job-focused interview. These activities require that members engage in courses of action that display their knowledge of organisational-specific procedures, common-sense reasoning and professional skills. For our purposes, this thesis focuses in on cases to examine how professionals organise their practical work routines through which NEET to EET transitions are produced through everyday work.

By drawing on this area of sociological research, the thesis also contributes to debates about how NEET policy is formulated in practice, and how professionals organise interventions into young people’s education, employment and training. This answers a call from researchers in social work, youth work, and support services to specify the ‘everyday practices’ that professionals use when supporting target groups and how those practices shape the production of state services. The thesis also contributes to debates about the practical relevancies and considerations attended to by practitioners when implementing active labour market policies. It highlights the importance of considering practitioners’ skills, knowledge

and competencies in the realisation of policy outcomes. This contribution comes at a historical juncture where the provision of public services – employment-related, training, youth and social work – have been hard hit by the austerity response to the 2008 global financial crisis and ‘great recession’. In the UK, this debate has focused upon the effects of austerity, the reduced spending on public services, the restructuring of local authority youth service provision, and the knock-on effects on the ability for professionals to work with young people and recipients of employment services. As a Unison report in 2016 indicated, the reduction in public spending has resulted in smaller budgets for local authorities, cuts to youth service staffing levels and closure of youth clubs. This report estimated that there has been a reduction of £387 million reduction in youth service funding from 2010 to 2016, over 3,600 youth service jobs lost, 603 youth clubs closed, and 160,000 fewer places in youth clubs (Unison 2016). Rather than treat this context as an explanatory resource for the following case studies, the thesis seeks to offer ethnographic details of how practitioners made sense of contextual particulars, such as public sector finances in the course of everyday work activities.

The thesis also engages with debates about how social policy researchers analyse the transitions between education and work, and methodological considerations in analysing the attitudes of job-seekers enrolled in public employment programs. Researchers have taken up and analysed the testimony of ‘activation workers’ about jobseekers’ attitudes and behaviours, arguing that such testimony give a more accurate account of jobseekers’ attitudes towards paid employment (Dunn 2010, 2013, 2014). The following chapters seek to demonstrate the limitations of Dunn’s claim that the views of activation workers can be used as evidence to verify whether a ‘dependency culture’ exists amongst their cohort of job-seeking clients. The modest critique that we propose is that it is necessary to describe the practical relevance of such accounts given by ‘activation workers’ and how these accounts

about jobseekers' attitudes are treated as relevant within a course of action and organisational context, and how they were used in undertaking ordinary 'activation' activities. Such an approach that uses these accounts as evidence which verify the existence of dependency culture seem to be largely disinterested in the content of these activation workers' professional practices or in the actual interactions between activation workers and clients, and in the organisational settings for implementing employment or training programs.

The thesis attempts to show how Dunn's lack of interest in situated work practices results in misunderstanding activation workers' ways of working. Our focus will instead be on describing the situated accounting practices that professionals use in the course of this 'activation', or *intervention work*. These accounting practices are ways that members of society make everyday scenes observable and reportable for practical purposes (Garfinkel 1967). The thesis will describe professionals' competence in making their work accountable in the course of ordinary organisational activities. In paying close attention to the details of these accounting practices, the thesis seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of how professionals' account of jobseekers' or NEETs' attitudes, behaviours, actions, characteristics, and so on, display a reflexive orientation to organisational settings and use of ordinary sense-making practices to organise those settings.

In order to offer this alternate account about the practices of activation workers, the thesis takes up a program of research within ethnomethodology, namely studies of work. Such an approach emphasises detailed studies of how professionals conduct their work. This approach offers the possibility of describing the content of intervention work, and how professionals undertake such work through the organisation of practical actions, interactions, record-keeping practices, and the accomplishment of routine work tasks. In presenting the following ethnographic chapters, the thesis describes how professionals organise NEET to EET transitions through as a feature of 'everyday organizational working life' (Rouncefield

and Tolmie 2011, xxiv). In order to collect observations about these accounting practices, the thesis draws on fieldwork observations and interviews conducted in Greater London during 2015 and 2016. The majority of the fieldwork was conducted in three settings: with staff in a private agency delivering a local authority funded employment program; with practitioners delivering a NEET traineeship in a local authority youth service; and with a membership organisation that represents London local authorities in their lobbying and campaigning activities. In the process of conducting the research, I aimed to become familiar with and competent in the practices that members of staff use to support these ‘NEET to EET’ transitions and collect materials to produce an ethnographic account about how members organise their work practices in these settings

Such an approach takes up a methodological policy in ethnomethodological studies which involve locating and conducting observational inquiries in ‘perspicuous settings’. Harold Garfinkel offered a formulation about what such settings offer to sociological researchers:

‘A perspicuous setting makes available, in that it consists of, material disclosures of practices of local production and natural accountability in technical details *with which to find, examine, elucidate, learn of, show and teach the organizational object as an in vivo work site.*’ (Garfinkel 2002: 181)

The four following analytic chapters offer ethnographic case studies about how the topic of ‘NEET to EET’ transitions are treated as a practical concern and routine object of attention for members of those settings. Our focus is therefore on how this topic is treated as a practical matter which requires the coordination and organisation of activities by groups of professionals within these settings. In this way each of the following analytic chapters offers a set of specific observations about the work that professionals undertake in order to produce



‘NEET to EET’ transitions as an object in their work routines. This involves describing the methods through which professionals organise their activities through ‘practical sociological reasoning’ and through talk and conduct (Garfinkel 1967). The thesis draws attention to the methods whereby professionals encounter, observe, and make sense of ‘everyday troubles’ in their organisational affairs (Emerson 2009, 2015). Focusing on these ‘everyday troubles’ offers a methodological device with which to observe how professionals make sense of how they could, should, or can implement programs and policies that transition young people from ‘NEET to EET’. Using this notion of ‘everyday troubles’ provides a methodological device to make visible how members formulate methods for organising their work tasks when the taken-for-granted organisation of social life is disrupted.

The thesis also aims to contribute to a corpus of ethnomethodological studies about how practitioners implement public policy programs focused on unemployment, back-to-work interventions and welfare provision (Boeringer 2010; Button *et al* 2012; Toerin *et al* 2012; Linell and Fredin 1995; Miller 1991; Solberg 2011; Zimmerman 1969). The thesis offers case studies which demonstrate how ethnomethodological approach can be used to re-specify key topics in sociological research, namely how youth unemployment is treated as a practical problem in the work of professionals. In order to do this the thesis presents findings from fieldwork with professionals about their workplaces practice, their organisational accounting practice, and how they organise the implementation of projects, programs and policies. In doing so, the thesis addresses a familiar topic within social scientific studies of NEETs and youth unemployment by answering the following research questions: How are the topics of NEETs and youth unemployment orientated towards through practical action by members of this setting? How do members organise their activities to account for their efforts to work on ‘NEET to EET’ transitions? What practical issues and concerns do members identify in the course of undertaking this work? How do members organise ordinary activities

through talk and conduct in these settings? How do members account for the troubles they face in the course of conducting this work?

### *1.1 Transitions from 'NEET to EET'*

The thesis aims to contribute to research in the areas of sociology of youth, youth studies and sociology of work, through fieldwork with groups of professionals as they support young people to move from 'NEET to EET'. The notion of youth transitions is a familiar one to researchers interested in the field of Youth Studies and Youth and Community Work. In simple terms, it refers to target groups of young people who are 'disengaged' and therefore 'at risk' of a variety of social problems. The notion of moving young people from 'NEET to EET' was relayed during an interview with a youth worker. It describes what 'outcomes' that professionals should pursue when working with young people. It also describes an orientation that practitioners should take to encourage young people to engage or participate in some form of educational or training activity, whether that be to enrol in a further education college or to take up waged employment. In this sense, whilst NEETs and youth unemployment are a 'classic' topic in public policy debates and a classic category of issues in research on 'social problems' for practitioners, there are specific considerations about how they treat their work with NEETs. As framed in academic and policy debates, youth transitions involve young people moving from education-to-work or from out-of-work benefits into employment or training. The thesis will focus on how the transitions between 'NEET and EET' offers an analytic space with which to analyse how the category of NEETs is constituted through professional practices and in administrative settings.

This focus provides scope to offer praxiological specification about a number of topics prevalent in academic debates about risk factors which are relevant in leading young

people to become NEET, the experience of youth transitions, and the organisation of state services, and the creation of new professional and occupational roles for encouraging young people to engage with education, employment or training. Contributions to these debates have previously sought to construct effect screening tools for identifying which young people have higher risk factors of becoming NEET (Arnold and Baker 2013), and analyse how unemployment is constructed through the delivery of public policy interventions (DuBois 2010; Boland and Griffin 2015; Mazouz 2015). The thesis builds on this tradition by focusing attention on the implementation of public policy programs focused on NEET groups. Other research in this tradition has sought to explain how the realisation of public policy programs is actualised through the organisational work of staff in street level bureaucracies (Lipsky 2010). This conceptualisation of how public policies is actualised in practice focuses upon the fact that the implementation of public policy programs requires important interpretative resources and the discretionary application of policy mandates in real-world situations by staff in street level bureaucracies. In conjunction to this literature, qualitative and quantitative studies in sociological and social policy literatures have focused on the outcomes and experiences of participants in government employment and training programs, whether that be the Youth Training Scheme, New Deal for Young People, the Work Programme (Blundell *et al* 2003; Davies 2013; Finn 1987; Mizen 1995). Other contributions have also focused on the lived experience of young people undergoing periods of unemployment or precarious work and the effects of increased ‘conditionality’ and strict controls on citizens as recipients of out-of-work benefits. The thesis offers a new contribution to these previous analyses by interrogating the ordinary activities through which NEET to EET transitions are organised.

# Youth Contract

If you are 16 to 17 years old and not in education, employment or training (NEET), we can support and help you to move into education, training or employment.

Call today to speak to a personal mentor or come along to one of our informal drop in sessions to explore your options.

Monday to Thursday  
11am to 3pm, or call to make an appointment

18 St Marys Road,  
Peckham, SE15 2DW  
Tel: 020 7525 4545



[www.southwark.gov.uk/16+youthcontract](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/16+youthcontract)

*Figure 1.1:* Promotional material for the Youth Contract in the London Borough of Southwark.

During conversations with youth workers during fieldwork, they talked about their efforts to move young people from 'NEET to EET'. They described how they tried to do this through finding ways in which to encourage and incentivise young people to leave their home, to attend workshops, to sign up to training programs, to answer phone calls. These youth workers sometimes did this by tracking the whereabouts of young people through door-knocking and calling parents. In one sense the 'NEET to EET' phrase neatly summarised how these youth workers accounted for the outcomes they sought to produce by their efforts. These were outcomes that youth workers were accountable for in assessing their job performance. These outcomes were enumerated in terms of the number of clients that youth workers had *engaged* in activities associated with making these transitions. In another sense, the 'NEET to EET' phrase invites questions about how these youth workers undertook this work to support young people in order to produce these outcomes. Reiterating this operational outcome did not specify what practices these youth workers undertook in order to support young people make these transitions.

The thesis attempts to take up this topic by focusing on how professionals work on transitions 'from NEET to EET'. This contrasts with other approaches to studying NEET interventions designed encourage young people into education, employment or training. The thesis looks to describe the ordinary work practices of professionals who are administer and run programs that facilitate such transitions. Each of the following chapters offers a vantage point with which to address this work: Chapter Three focuses on a network of employment advisors and one team delivering a wage subsidy program; Chapter Four focuses on a team of local authority youth service workers running the day-to-day operations for a traineeship program; Chapter Five focuses upon how different practitioners contribute to the production of 'participation data' which accounts for the total 'reportable cohort' within local authority areas; and Chapter Seven focuses upon the lobbying efforts of a group of leaders in the

education and training sector. Each chapter sets out to describe specific practices that members use to make sense of how to organise their *intervention work*.

## 1.2 *Intervention Work*

Although the notion of *intervention work* is developed over the course of the thesis, the thesis does not propose to offer a comprehensive definition of what this work is or how this work should be accredited, funded, assessed, evaluated or critiqued. Our use of this notion in the thesis seeks to contribute to recent debates about a ‘sociology of interventions’. Gil Eyal and Larissa Bucholz (2010) have suggested a shift from the sociological study of intellectuals and experts, and towards a program of research that would investigate the way that scientific knowledge and expertise is translated into intervention programs and how networks of knowledge are constructed in policy settings. They open up a potentially rich area of study by identifying what they call the ‘multiplicity of modes of intervention’ (2010: 133). The thesis offers a sustained response towards what this multiplicity could be made up of and what practical actions constitute interventions in organisational settings by offering four studies of professionals, practitioners and staff undertaking interventions directed towards ‘NEET to EET’ transitions. The thesis shows how such a ‘sociology of interventions’ program can be taken up to describe the practical skills, knowledge and resource and how these are displayed within organisational settings in order to accomplish interventions.

The topic of interventions is a familiar trope in research about public policies in social science and social policy literature. The thesis puts forward the notion of intervention work as a heuristic device with which to collect observations about how practitioners orientate towards ‘NEET to EET’ transitions as a practical matter. As I will describe in Chapters Two and Three, the notion of intervention work closely resembles what Donileen Loseke (1999,

2015) has called ‘social problems work’. This notion looks to describe the work undertaken by professionals in social welfare agencies, to describe how these professionals work with user groups, how they define what claims to public assistance these users make, and how professionals shape the definition of ‘social problems’ through their everyday interactional work (Holstein and Miller 1997, 2003). The thesis therefore also contributes to research on ‘social problems work’ which has previously focused on a variety of social problems and associated identity categories, such as substance users, battered women, homelessness, and so on. These studies offer insights into the way that social problems categories are historically and interactionally constructed through processes of defining and claims-making by policy-makers, politicians, policy entrepreneurs, practitioners, advocates and (Best 2012). The thesis draws from this literature by offering four detailed ethnographic studies of the intervention work involved in the design, delivery, and provision of social policy programs that target NEETs, and how this work is organised through talk and conduct. The chapters look to describe the practices these members use to make sense of how NEET transitions, unemployment, education-to-work transitions, service populations, organisational requirements are treated as relevant features of those settings.

The analytic chapters describe how these professionals’ practical action and competencies display how these transitions are organised and accounted for in administrative settings. This work looks very mundane and practical. Our focus on intervention work contributes to debates about recent efforts to professionalise the employability sector by introducing professional qualifications for ‘employability professionals’ by the Institute for Employability Professionals and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, or efforts to highlight the need for higher level qualifications for ‘employability leadership’ by the University of Coventry in partnership with the Institute of Employability Professionals (see Figure 1.2). Our focus on the situated practices and interactional activities that



## Career Prospects

There is a wide range of job roles within the Employment Related Services sector ranging from senior management roles to entry level positions. In addition there are numerous roles in the wider employability industry including those working in Education Business Partnerships, Colleges, Universities, and other business and education settings. See diagram for examples of job roles.

Designed and endorsed by the industry, when you graduate with the MSc Employability Leadership you will be signalling to public and private Employment Related Services employers and Government in the UK that you have acquired the latest skills to tackle current challenges within the Employment Related Services industry.

CEO / Managing Director	Director of Services	Operations Director	Supply Chain Manager	Business Development Manager
Quality Compliance Manager	HR Manager	Business Manager	Financial Risk Manager	Employment Trainer Manager
Sub Contracting Manager	Senior Recruitment Manager	Internal Auditor	Learning & Development Executive	Procurement Manager
Senior Assessor	Senior Employment Trainer	Recruitment Manager	Senior Specialist Adviser	Advisor Manager
Assessor	Employment Trainer	Personal Adviser	Employment Consultant	Employment Engagement Consultants
Administrator	Business Development Assistant	Work-related Learning Co-ordinator	Trainer	Job Coach



*Figure 1.2:* 'There is a wide range of job roles within the Employment Related Services sector ranging from senior management roles to entry level positions'. Promotional brochure for an MSc Employability Leadership, Coventry University, developed in partnership with the Institute of Employability Professionals (2014).



professionals undertaken show that the work practices of ‘employability professionals’ are not reducible to formal models which specify the competencies or qualities required in specific job roles.

In recent years there have been debates about the roles and competencies which are necessary in order implement to ‘professionalise’ and improve the outcomes of the employment related services sector. Speaking in 2016 at the launch of a research report about the experience of service users in the Jobcentre, a founding board member of the Institute of Employability Professionals offered, as she put it, ‘a bit of an everywoman’s reaction to the report’. Her response discussed the mixture of skills and knowledge that should be expected of professionals who support jobseekers into employment. She also remarked on how the report raised questions about the difference between job role specifications and the experience of service users. The report, she said, ‘makes highly unsettling reading, frankly it angered me’ (from an audio recording at the report launch, May 12, 2016). In order to understand what had gone so ‘wrong’ in the encounters between service users, work coaches, personal advisors, and the welfare system, she described the main ‘qualities’ associated with the Jobcentre work coach role and how this compares to what is described in the report.

‘...the qualities of a great sports coach are expressed very (sufficiently) as positive, enthusiastic, supportive, trusting, focused, goal orientated, knowledgeable, observant, respectful, patient and a clear communicator, exactly the attributes we would expect from a work coach, sadly the reality if we are to take the report’s evidence at face value is that with a few notable exceptions, work coaches fall very far short of the expectations of their role profile and we have to ask why this is the case, why are so many work coaches not fulfilling the coaching elements of their job description...’

The reality that the board member points to suggests a disjuncture between how a ‘role profile’ reads in print, how it is undertaken by practitioners in real world settings, and how

this practitioner's work activities are understood and described by service users. These activities constitute a 'missing interactional what' in accounts of employability professionals' work practice. Rather than approach this topic by proposing to explain the reasons for this disjuncture, the thesis sets out to describe the interactional work through which practitioners, professionals and service users orientate to ordinary activities in the course of, for instance, implementing employment support. This work is orientated towards organisational practices involved in making sense of young peoples' identities through talk and conduct, 'normal' routines, record-keeping practices, coordinating and accounting for activities between government agencies, and teams of practitioners in welfare, employment, voluntary agencies and local authorities.

### *1.3 Organisation of the thesis*

The following chapters initially outline the approach we will take to the case studies, before moving on to presenting materials from the ethnographic fieldwork in organisational settings. Chapters Two and Three provide an initial theoretical and methodological backdrop for the thesis. In Chapter Two I review academic and policy literature about how NEETs and youth unemployment figure in public policy debates and the administration of support services. This involves addresses debates about how welfare policies have moved toward a model that combines welfare-to-work, activation, conditionality, and compulsion in the provision of public services. I also describe how sociologists of work and public administration have described the organisational concerns and professional practices used by 'street level bureaucrats' who implement public policies. Chapter Three extends this discussion by proposing to draw upon a tradition of research in the social sciences, namely ethnomethodological studies of work through ethnographic fieldwork. This approach aims to

explicate the mundane, routine practices that are used by professionals in workplace settings. The chapter situates the thesis in this tradition and outlines the ethnographic approach taken up in the data collection. I describe how the thesis uses a set of data collection methods. I then describe the rationale for the organisational settings that the data collection was conducted, and describe the process of gaining and maintaining access to these field sites and relevant ethical considerations in these sites

The following four chapters then report the analytic component of the thesis. Each of these chapters describes research conducted in different organisational settings. Chapter Four reports on fieldwork with a team of employment support staff about how their work of delivering a wage subsidy project for NEET youth involved routinely attending to administrative documents and record-keeping practices. The chapter offers examples of how members of staff undertake tasks associated with the wage subsidy project, and how those tasks involve the production and use of administrative documents. In this way the chapter seeks to indicate how intervention work involves competently accounting for this work in administrative documents. Chapter Five turns to describe fieldwork with local authority youth service staff as they deliver a NEET traineeship program. The chapter looks to specify how the ‘participation’ of staff and trainees is made sense of by staff. The chapter describes how members of staff made sense of the trainees’ identities in talk during initial meetings and in the first couple of days of the program. The chapter focuses upon what considerations members of staff make evident whilst staff are ‘getting to know’ a new cohort of NEET trainees. It describes what observations and evidence staff seem to use when making sense of the identity of this new cohort and how this is formulated through ‘shop talk’.

The next two chapters continue with a focus upon how participation and youth policy are implemented by focusing upon the work involved in monitoring the delivery of youth policy and in the development of lobbying work in the educational and skills sector in

London. Chapter Six, addresses how the statutory duty for local authorities to produce ‘participation data’ about how the Raising the Participation Age – the ‘RPA duty’ – was implemented through the activities of local authority youth service staff. This chapter describes whether young people are participating or not in some form of education, employment or training. It demonstrates this by presenting fieldwork and transcript extracts from institutional settings in which staff collected, reported, and analysed information about a ‘reportable cohort’ of young people. The chapter describes how ‘participation data’ is produced through the routine practices of staff, and how these practices constitute the intelligibility of any piece of ‘participation data’. Chapter Seven analyses audio-recordings of meetings held by a membership organisation who lobby and campaign on issues of young peoples’ education and skills on behalf of local authorities in Greater London. The chapter seeks to specify how the group’s efforts to lobby for young people is formulated through talk-in-interaction. These formulations are used to offer some methodological suggestions about researching ‘pieces of work’. We suggest how these pieces of work are specified as objects requiring the attention of staff and members. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by drawing together the main points from each of the analytic chapters and returning to the initial research questions. The chapter also indicates the main contributions that the thesis has made to sociological studies of youth transitions, the organisations of employment and training programs, and ethnomethodological studies of work and makes suggestions about future areas of study associated with the thesis.

Before moving to develop the notion of intervention work in the analytic chapters, the next chapter reviews relevant sociological and social policy literature on the administration of street level bureaucracies, the management and organisation public services and touch upon a literature about the experience of job-seekers and young people as clients within human

service organisations. In this way the thesis will begin to develop an approach for describing how 'NEET to EET' transitions are organised and accounted for.

## **TWO. Literature Review**

This chapter reviews a set of relevant sociological and social policy literature so as to develop a framework for the subsequent case study chapters. This chapter touches upon debates in sociology about the historical construction of interventions in labour markets and employability. The chapter aims to provide a contextual account about how sociologists have debated the changing modes through which states and government have reformed institutions, policies and programs to intervene in labour markets, and the forms that such interventions have taken. This introduction will be used to set up for the following analytic chapters which aim to describe how these interventions are routinely managed as a practical affair and the methods that members use to conduct this work. The first two sections of the chapter approach the question of how unemployment has been approached as a social and economic problem for policymakers. It introduces the way that economists, social policy advisors and successive governments implemented active labour market policies, developed in the 1960s, so as to produce ‘supply side’ solutions to unemployment. The chapter provides a brief account of the way that academics have analysed a paradigm shift away from Keynesian welfare policies towards conditional, workfare style provision of employment and welfare support. This shift also saw the introduction of specific measures undertaken to target young unemployed groups through supply-side policy interventions in labour markets, as well as broader systems of youth service support to tackle the twinned risks of worklessness and NEET. The chapter then expand upon how these policies have been analysed in the context of

critiques about the nature of work and employment in neoliberal and capitalist labour markets. The last sections point towards a set of organisational settings in which active labour market policies and NEET interventions have been implemented. The chapter describes sociological and social policy debates about the street level implementation of policies and further develops the notion of *intervention work*. The chapter provides insights from a number of case studies into the work undertaken at the front-lines of service delivery and policy actualisation. The chapter concludes by introducing the tradition of ethnomethodology and begins to introduce how the present thesis will undertake ethnographic case studies of the professional practices used to organise the implementation of NEET interventions.

## 2.1 *Historical studies of labour market interventions*

This first section provides a sketched history of labour market interventions. Contemporary social policy debates about the organisation of welfare and employment services and their relation to local and national labour markets needs to be treated in historical context. It is therefore necessary to indicate that current debates about NEET policy are complicated by the fact that the life stage of ‘youth’ spans the provision of services through public employment agencies, national and local youth services, educational institutions, and other training agencies. In order to understand the way that a distinct category of unemployed persons emerged at a historical conjuncture, it is necessary to explain how governments have shaped what public employment services should do for unemployed populations, such as NEETs . This section will briefly indicate this historical literature on this topic before moving on to explore how sociologists and organisational researchers have described recent changes in the way that professionals design, manage, and implement interventions into young people’s education and training. In general terms, the thesis aims to provide a basis for explaining how a ‘sociology of interventions’, as Eyal and other authors have described, can

be a useful framework to describe how labour market interventions are put into practice by professionals in organisational settings (Eyal and Buchholz 2010).

One of the dominant approaches in sociological studies of labour market interventions has involved historical analyses of the restructuring of public employment services. In such accounts, historical analysis can provide insights into the social, historical, political contingencies that are relevant to the structuring of welfare, employment and educational policies. It can indicate the way that different social interests have motivated the reorganisation of state structures and the provision of state services and public assistance. Writing in *Office of Hope*, David Price (2000) argued that there have been three dominant models used to organise public employment services in the United Kingdom since its inception at the beginning of the twentieth century. Firstly, 'labour market transparency': which involves the provision of information about vacancies, job seekers, employers and labour market information. Secondly, a 'benefit control' model: which involves the provision of welfare payments and the administration of 'checks' and 'tests' on welfare recipients. Thirdly, a 'social welfare' model: which involves the broad and universalistic provision of 'individual help and support' (2000: 3-5). As none of these models have been implemented in a pure form, David Price describes the shifting emphases on different aspects of these three models in a century of legislative and administrative reforms.

This approach contrasts with researchers who explain that welfare systems and employment services have become increasingly interlinked since the introduction of neoliberal reforms to the welfare state from the 1980s. David Price offers historical justification for arguing that the particular composition of employment services is largely determined by policy priorities and legislative reforms. Price also provides evidence that the management of employment support and welfare system changes as different governments emphasise how to reform the relationship between states, welfare recipients, and unemployed



populations. In support of this notion, a number of authors have emphasised how reforms to eligibility criteria and the conditions for receiving state welfare have sought to impose market *discipline* on jobseekers. Jamie Peck's (2001) seminal research on 'workfare states' demonstrates how transitions to a 'workfare', or 'work first' model, of organising employment services were undertaken during the 1990s in the US, UK and Canada. Such reforms have been described as aiming to restrict access to public welfare assistance by imposing increased control over the activities of unemployed populations and welfare recipients. In such an analysis, the re-shaping of employment services is part of a broader restructuring of capitalistic wage relations that sought to exercise increased control and 'regulation' over the conduct of employees and unemployed populations (see also Greer 2016). Such a critical approach highlights how workers are subject to increased control in employment and welfare regimes. These regimes, these authors argue, have been reformed around the idea of encouraging out-of-work populations to quickly reintegrate into a precarious labour market. In such an account, the introduction of additional behavioural controls and checks upon the conduct of unemployed populations aims to regulate the supply of cheap labour and 'commodify' labour relations (Greer 2016).

It has also been argued that in order to adequately appreciate the historical constitution of state provision of welfare and employment services, it is necessary to acknowledge the way that 'deservingness' has been embedded as a structuring condition of welfare provision (Mah 2009; Whiteside 1991). A key feature in the historical emergence of the welfare state, these authors argue, is the moral judgements embedded in the distinctions made between deserving and undeserving poor. Rather than a universalistic system of welfare provision, such distinctions are associated with the classifications of new policy categories. Historical evidence for this is found in the way that the workhouses and the Poor Law of 1834 functioned through the requirement that citizens demonstrate that they were

‘responsible’ subjects. Such moral judgements were also embedded within the policy categories and institutional practices associated with Labour Exchanges, founded in 1909, as well as the Unemployment Insurance and Transitional Income schemes during the 1930s. Both of these government schemes required public officials to compel citizens towards engaging in morally upstanding behaviour, demonstrate that they were seeking work, and involved public officials distinguishing between groups of unemployed persons in order to administer individual entitlements to state support (Fraser 1981; King 1995: 20-33, 78-85). In institutionalizing such practices of distinguishing between populations of deserving, able-bodied, discouraged, and lazy citizens, the emergence of a public employment service during the twentieth century undertook many of the same modes of assessing publics by introducing examinations about ‘who’ members of the public were. They were, in short, assessed according to a set of policy categories that distinguished the characteristics of persons that services would and would not support. The following sections will provide an overview of policy developments related to the provision of employment services from 1978 to the 2010s.

## 2.2 *Youth transitions from ‘NEET to EET’*

The topic of youth transitions from education to work has also been a productive line of inquiry for social scientists. Our present focus on transitions from ‘NEET to EET’ introduces a different set of considerations related to professional groups who administer such transitions. These considerations include the way that the category of NEET refers to a population groups who are not engaged in a recognised form of ‘participation’. The topic of youth transitions also involves a set of issues associated with the way that young people are legally and administratively differentiated from adults – as ‘NEETs’ is not a category used to refer to ‘adult jobseekers’ – and how government reforms have changed the way in which young people transition compulsory schooling into paid employment. This construction of

distinct stages of life has policy consequences. Social policy researchers and historians have reflected on the ways that ‘age’ is a historically constructed phenomenon, one which is contingent upon the set of cultural ideals and social values invested within specific phases of life (Mizen 2003). Undoubtedly, the way that social expectations about age differs according to time and location.

To take our present case, the distinction between youth and adulthood is a contested issue. This is partly observable in the ways that social policies have aimed to intervene in youth unemployment as a specific type of unemployment. Such policies have looked to distinguish young people according to age and a set of associated characteristics. Historical records offer cases which show how social policy interventions have aimed to influence the integration of young people into the labour force. One example from 1978 is of a seminar series on youth unemployment organised by a right-wing think tank, the Tory Reform Group. Three stand-out recommendations emerged from the group’s work. These included: a) encouraging the young towards emerging economic sectors (technologies, computers, high-tech manufacturing) and away from ‘overmanned’ declining industries (shipbuilding, steel production); b) develop a ‘work experience and job creation programme’, through wage incentive subsidy schemes (a ‘youth employment subsidy’); c) and the 14-19 ‘education and training systems must be reorganised in conjunction with industry to promote relevant and lasting education’<sup>1</sup>. In order to understand the relevance of these recommendations, it is necessary to consider them alongside two decades of policy reforms about how to address youth unemployment. In order to reckon with a persistent problem of youth unemployment, the recommendations of the Tory Reform Group incorporated ideas about how to intervene in labour markets which were developed during the 1960s, so-called active labour market

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from AF Goodger, Deputy Chairman, Tory Reform Group; TRG/2/15/106 - ‘youth unemployment’. (Tory Reform Group, 1978. Records kept in London School of Economics Library Archive.) See also, Worswick, 1991: 104-108.

policies. Although there are a wide variety of programs that count as active labour market policies, they are generally more strongly associated with ‘social democratic’ public policies (Bonoli 2010). Ian Greer has recently argued that active labour market policies are increasingly used to introduce ‘discipline’ into unemployed workers (Greer 2016). On the other hand, Craig Berry (2014) has indicated that government underinvestment in active labour market policies in the UK undermines efforts to use ALMP policies to inculcate specific forms of behaviour amongst program participants.

By identifying solutions to the social problem of youth unemployment, active labour market policies have been used to encourage increased labour market participation through establishing mechanisms whereby employers received funding for hiring young workers. As well as stimulating the creation of new entry points for young people to access labour markets, a series of legislative changes from the 1980s have also worked to differentiate access to welfare provision based upon the criteria of age. In one sense, this has involved reforming how social policies structure the transition from youth to adulthood. Some examples of these changes include the introduction of Income Support (IS), as replacement for the Supplementary Benefit in 1986 which brought in lower benefit levels for under-25s. In 1988, 16 and 17-year olds were no longer ineligible to receive IS. In 1990 the benefit rate for 18 to 24-year olds was reduced by 20%, compared with the adult rate. These legislative changes actively work to naturalise the difference between groups based upon biological age. In a different sense to distinguishing ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, the social security system and employment service provision relies upon policies which distinguish population groups through the use of age categories.

Other changes taking place during the 1980s and 1990s re-shaped how social security was provided. These changes increased the scope with which the state could compel benefit claimants’ to undertake mandatory activities to stay eligible for receipt of welfare payments.

For many authors, this increasing ‘conditionality’ in welfare provision indicates a broader shift away from universal entitlement in social security provision. The introduction of an ‘actively seeking work’ test in 1989 and the introduction of ‘back to work’ plans in 1990 brought increased powers to employment service staff to restrict the unconditional provision of state benefits. These shifts were more forcefully materialised through the passing of the Jobseekers Act in 1995 which introduced the requirement for benefit claimants to sign a ‘Jobseekers Agreement’ (see Peck 2001, King 1995). This legislation also involved the reform of unemployment benefits into a ‘Jobseeker’s Allowance’. The introduction of this legislation also provided employment service staff with new powers to require jobseekers to actively seek work, prepare for interviews, appear at Jobcentres for routine interviews, and appropriately present themselves in terms of ‘appearance’ and ‘dress’ (Classen 2011).

As previously mentioned, these reforms have been analysed as indicative of a broader restructuring of capitalist employment relations. Jamie Peck and Bob Jessop have described the 1980s and 1990s as marking a shift away from a Keynesian welfare contract towards a ‘post-Fordist’, ‘post-welfare’, workfarist regime (Burrows and Loader 1994; Michaud 2004; Peck 2001). However, the transformation of the employment service away from universal welfare to workfarist regime has been described as a widespread attempt in Euro-American countries to instil work discipline amongst benefit claimants, introduce legal mechanisms for regulating urban labour markets, and develop two-tier welfare systems (Jessop 1994; Mead 2012). Researchers have also explored how the introduction of workfarist policies have altered the provision of state services in the global South, and the way that policy experts and ‘policy intermediaries’ *export* social welfare policies from the global South to the global North (Peck and Theodore 2010). Other authors have indicated how workfare-style policies have produced new types of inequalities across gender, nationality, and geographic boundaries as economic injustice is retrenched in new administrative practices (Carpenter *et*

*al* 2007; Grover and Piggott 2013; Tait 2007; Walker and Wiseman 2003). Into this context, the problem of youth unemployment and NEETs is usually approached as having distinctive features associated with the nature of youth labour markets and youth transitions from school to work.

Research on youth transitions have explored the way in which state-funded training programs for unemployed young people were introduced as part of a broader industrial strategy which targeted unemployed working-class youth during the 1970s and 1980s (Mizen 2003). Some authors have argued that these state training programs were relatively ineffective in alleviating the precarious transitions of school leavers into paid employment (Jancius 2006). Analyses of these training programs have argued that the main state-funded youth training initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s, namely the Youth Opportunities Training and Youth Training Schemes, provided little by way of resulting employment opportunities (Finn 1987; King 1995: 113-166; Mizen 2003; Raffe 1981). These authors argue that such training schemes generally offered ‘poor quality’ training and mostly worked to provide ‘cheap labour’ for employers (for a comparison of training schemes in the 1930s and 1980s, see Whiteside 1991: 90-109).

Other accounts have also sought to explain young people’s experience of these training programs. Some authors have critically described the way that state training programs exercised forms of social control by ‘channelling [unemployed youth’s] potentially disruptive disillusionment into non-threatening forms’ (Stafford 1981: 58). In another sense, Phil Mizen has argued that the restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state towards Monetarist social policies in the 1980s also involved a shift towards market-based interventions. This restructuring has involved placing the financial burden of further and higher education onto students. For Mizen, this restructuring of the contract between state and citizens has involved a shift away from policies that encourage ‘full employment’

towards policies that ‘guaranteed’ places on state training programs (Mizen 2004: 1-22, 47-75). The next section turns to provide some more detail on some of these changes to the provision of employment and training services since the mid-1990s. The present thesis will contribute to a literature on the provision of state-funded training and youth unemployment programs through providing an ethnographic perspective on the practical activities through which such programs are managed.

### 2.3 *Activation and welfare-to-work*

The organisation of welfare and employment programs in the UK was reformed following the acclaimed successes of welfare-to-work programs associated with the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act in the US. In the UK, New Labour’s New Deal employment programs sought to incorporate a similar policy design by introducing measures which required welfare recipients to undertake so-called ‘job-search’ activities (Crisp 2012; King and Wickham-Jones 2002; Peck 2002, 2011; Peck and Theodore 2001). The New Deal employment program was rolled out in 1998 and stood as New Labour’s flagship welfare-to-work program. There were a number of specialist employment programs for different target groups within the New Deal framework. The New Deal for Young People mandated that benefit claimants aged 18-24 should follow back-to-work pathways after six months of claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance. These pathways included: a) ‘Gateway’: four months of intensive job search support; b) ‘New Deal Options’: six months of full-time unpaid employment in four options of Environmental Task Force, Voluntary sector, Subsidized jobs, or Education & Training; and, c) ‘Follow through’: return to intensive job search. These ‘pathways’ established phases for organising employment interventions. During the New Labour government, additional pilots were developed which involved some groups of participants on the New Deal for Young People, and subsequent Flexible New Deal,

receiving more intensive support after only 3 months (Davies 2012; Finn 2003; Theodore 2007). These national employment programs also involved the use of wage subsidies to place jobseekers within specific industries. These subsidized employment placements also required jobseekers to participate in job-search and training activities (Cressey 1999: 173-183). Even during this period of investment in supply-side policies, researchers have argued that these policies have produced limited impact on expanding the low skilled youth labour market (Blundell, Reed, Von Reenan and Shephard 2003: 17-31).

During the New Labour years, many evaluation reports have focused on the New Deal's role in stimulating the creation of 12 months paid work placements in 'intermediate labour markets' for the long-term unemployed and young people without work experience (Helms and Cumbers 2005: 20-23; Marshall and MacFarlane 2000; Natival, Sunley and Martin 2002). By October 2009, amidst complaints that New Labour had was no longer adequately stimulating the youth labour market, the government introduced a new wage subsidy scheme called the Future Jobs Fund. This program provided short term employment placements, mostly concentrated in voluntary, charity, community and environment organisations. After the election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrats Coalition government in May 2010, the Flexible New Deal and Future Jobs Fund program were scrapped and a new set of employment programs were introduced. The next section turns to these developments builds on the discussion of active labour market policies and employment programs in order to describe a new set of employment and NEET measures introduced by the Coalition government in 2010 to 2015.



## 2.4 *Compulsory participation in EET*

The commissioning of employment programs and the reshaping of welfare provision by the Coalition government between 2011 and 2015 was broadly outlined in the Centre for Social Justice's *Breakthrough Britain* series of research reports. These reports introduced and justified wide ranging reforms to the provision of welfare and employment support by moving the social security system 'towards welfare that works'. This would be accomplished through establishing new methods of administering welfare support, such as through implementing reforms to the provision of overlapping benefits into a single scheme called Universal Credit (Centre for Social Justice 2008). Following the 2010 general election, the Coalition government also introduced a broad policy agenda that sought to join-up departmental efforts in a youth strategy which emphasised the principle that young people should be either 'earning or learning' (DfE 2011; DWP 2011). This approach building upon and modified some aspects of New Labour's Education and Skills Act 2008. This legislation raised the 'participation age' up from 16 to 18. Subsequently, young people would need to be encouraged to 'participate' in some recognised form of educational, employment or training (Simmons and Thompson 2013; DfE 2011). These changes also accompanied an expanded investment in apprenticeships, traineeships, and other employment programs.

Over this thirty-year period of reform to the provision of welfare and employment support, the distinction between mandatory and voluntary participation in employment programs has also been reformed around a principle of 'conditionality'. These reforms have introduced new mechanisms whereby Jobcentre staff are required to check that jobseekers are keeping to jobseeker agreements. In cases where jobseekers fail to meet a minimum set of required actions, jobcentre staff can 'sanction', i.e. suspend, welfare payments (Shutes and Taylor 2014). These sanctions include withdrawing entitlement to benefits for claimants who are not actively seeking work or fail to attend work focused interviews. Researchers have

drawn attention to the way that ‘sanctions’ and ‘conditionality’ may deter eligible claimants from registering as unemployed (Berg *et al* 2013; Eleveld 2014). Other authors have also remarked that increased conditionality in welfare provision, exclusion of youth groups due to new rules about age requirements for jobseekers allowance, have resulted in large numbers of young people being counted as economically inactive (Goujard, Petongolo and Von Reenen 2011: 46-47). In this sense, the rules about how population groups count in statistical categories is shaped through legislative and administrative reforms.

In terms of national employment programs, the Coalition government also introduced a new set of privately contracted employment services. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned a national payment-by-results welfare-to-work scheme, the Work Programme in June 2011. The Work Programme (2011-2016) introduced a ‘black box’ commissioning model that paid ‘prime providers’ a variable fee (using a classification of client groups according to their relative ‘distance from the labour market’) for securing employment outcomes for participants. The Coalition government also introduced specialist employment programs for young people. Firstly, the government replaced the Future Jobs Fund wage-subsidy with a Youth Contract for 18-24 year olds, aiming to deliver increased numbers of private sector job outcomes. Secondly, a Work Experience program provided places for 18-24 year olds in private sector organisations. Other employment-focused initiatives were introduced by the DWP in coordination with the Skills Funding Agency, the Education Funding Agency, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Education. These initiatives included Work Trials, Work Clubs, Work Together, Enterprise Clubs, New Enterprise Allowance, Sector-based work academies, and Community Work Placements (Dolphin 2014: 5-16). Additionally, the ‘Troubled Families’ program was set up for another type of claimant, designed to provide a ‘multi-agency’ package of behavioural interventions, such as substance use, employment, antisocial

behaviour (Fletcher *et al* 2012). This focus on the dynamics of family and domestic life has been analysed as indicative of a broadening focus on the neoliberal governance of ‘problem’ populations (Crossley 2016). Additional legislative changes during the 2010-2015 parliament included: removing eligibility for housing benefit for under 35-year olds, the abolishment of the Educational Maintenance Allowance, and the introduction of a loan system for Further Education courses. After this brief survey of recent employment programs introduced by New Labour and Coalition governments, the next section addresses the notion that social policy should encourage young people to be ‘earning or learning’. The section will do this by drawing upon accounts that are critical of the notion that social policy should be treated as an instrument to enhance the ‘employability’ of citizens.

## 2.5 *Earning or Learning*

One way that public employment programs and legislative changes have been recently characterised is through the notion that young people should be ‘earning or learning’. Although Work Experience and Enterprise Education has been a key feature of higher education since the 1970s, there have also been recent efforts to incorporate employability as a performance indicator as a way to measure students’ ‘destination data’ (McCafferty 2010). Lee Harvey (2001) has criticised using such ‘outcomes’ indicators to rank educational institutions. Harvey proposes an alternate, ‘employability-development’ indicator, for internal audits rather than external performance measurement, and argued that there is a need for greater clarity about terminology in order to ensure institution-wide policy planning.

Additionally, the notion of employability has also become associated with the organisation of active labour market policies and welfare-to-work programs. Dan Finn (2003) describes a general shift away from the policy of ‘full employment’ towards one which

prioritises ‘employability’, with an emphasis on the principles of ‘flexibility’ and ‘adaptability’ in employment programs. Lindsay and Dutton (2013) link the deployment of employability the UK welfare-to-work agenda, emphasising a number of ‘good practices’ for recipients of disability and incapacity benefits (Atfield 2016). Noting the importance of employability as part of a ‘welfare-to-work’ policy, Newman argued that employability policies generally fail to address underlying socio-economic inequalities and material poverty (Newman 2011). This critique states that ‘Human Capital’ investment are not sufficient solutions for alleviating unemployment (Dobbins, Plows and Lloyd-Williams 2014; Lindsay and Dutton 2013; Lindsay and McQuaid 2007). For some authors, effective employability strategies require the close coordination of local and national stakeholders to intervene in the regional economies and local labour markets (Lindsay and Mailand 2009). Sociologists have also highlighted that the discourse of employability does not account for longstanding discriminating of black and minority ethnic groups in education and employment, ‘ethnic penalties’ for second generation minorities entering labour markets, or the ‘spatial mismatch of skills’ within urban labour markets (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013: 158-162, 165-183; Heath, Rethon and Kilpi 2008; Houston 2005; Li 2015).

Other authors have highlighted how the notion encourages a form of ‘disciplinary’ control over labour. Ekaterina Chertkovskaya *et al* (2013) have called for the need to ‘give notice to employability’. The authors explain that the term has been deployed in a variety of ways since the 1880s. They also argue that the concept encourages the development of an ‘entrepreneurial self’ amongst workers, encouraging would-be workers to remain committed to the values of ‘flexibility’, ‘adaptability’ and ‘re-skilling’. They also indicate that current uses of the notion encourage the attribution of success and failure to individual efforts rather than structural arrangements (Cremin 2009).

Case studies on employability and labour market activation programs have also highlighted the cross-national differences in the relationship between job-search strategies and labour market institutions. Phoebe Moore (2010) has taken up this theme by drawing out the implications in international development policy agendas. Moore explains that there has been a concerted effort by national governments to refashion ‘employed’ workers into employable subjects of capital. Moore points to the way that the notion of an employable worker is well suited to the increasingly prevalence of insecure employment relations that characterise the neo-liberal economic order. In this discourse, the employable self is capable of enduring extended periods of unemployment by staying in touch with business contacts, attending networking events, creating a portfolio of marketable skills. Ofer Sharone (2013) presents offers further analytic material by presenting a case study which compares the experience of professionals in Israel and the U.S.A. Sharone suggests that labour market institutions structure these professionals’ experience of unemployment. Her case study describes how national contexts and institutional arrangements shape how jobseekers approach the ‘job search ‘games’, whether to emphasise their hard skills, personality, credentials and so on.

Such an approach to employability does not attend to a more radical reconceptualization of the relation between life and work. The assumption that unemployment is a ‘problem’ has been forcibly questioned in analyses of capitalist employment relations (Lafargue 2011). Ivor Southwood (2011) has criticised the pressures imposed on unemployed workers using public employment services in capitalist labour markets. Southwood develops the notion of ‘non-stop inertia’ to describe the physical and affective exhaustion caused by submitting to the demands of flexibility and compulsory job seeking. In describing unemployment as a ‘career’, Southwood points out that the reclassification of state benefits into a jobseeker’s allowance introduces onerous requirements

for engagement with mandatory training and job-search activities. Christopher Taylor (2014) takes up this theme by elaborating how the ‘refusal of work’ tradition within strands of Marxist analysis, has been developed through a variety of strategies that aim to sabotage the way that ‘the plantation diffuses itself through the world-system’ (2014: 17). Additionally, Kathi Weeks (2011) critique of ‘work’ points to the possibilities of developing an anti-work politics which incorporates feminist analysis with utopian imaginaries. Weeks argued that, in order to depart from capitalist work regimes, new modes of valuing time, relations, and life itself need to be politicized.

By putting labour market interventions into a historical context, we are better able to pose questions about how such policies and programs are implemented by practitioners who work ‘on the ground’. This requires paying attention to the professional practices and administrative structures through which interventions are implemented. In outlining the approach taken in this thesis to study intervention work, the following sections highlight how other studies have focused on the day-to-day work of staff delivering employment services and active labour market policies. In order to do this, the chapter describes organisational practices associated with staff working in Street Level Bureaucracies, undertaking what Miller and Holstein (1997, 2003) have called, ‘Social Problems Work’ (see also Spector and Kitsuse 1977). Such research draws from case studies of professionals delivering public welfare programs, and attends to the way that professionals and clients coordinate their actions through face-to-face interaction, managing organisational routines, and situated work practices. The chapter will then move on to provide examples of studies that describe how professionals undertake collaborative, situated and interactive work.

## 2.6 *Studying 'work' in street-level bureaucracies*

Researchers working to understand the practical basis upon which the set of preceding policies, programs, and plans, are realised, have emphasised a gap between how policies are described in texts and how they are practically implemented in organisational settings. This emphasis on the implementation of policies in social science and social policy literature brings a focus on the way that staff work in institutions and organisations to deliver upon policies that were decided elsewhere. The literatures on the sociology of organisations and street-level bureaucracy identifies how practitioners use discretion to make policy decisions in organisational settings, have to interpret how to apply policies in specific cases, how asymmetric power relations emerge from the difference in access to institutional knowledge and decision-making power between clients and professionals, and how professionals are constrained by staff-management relations in the delivering services to clients. This research tradition can be extended to analyse how practical knowledge and expertise about NEET interventions, activation programs and unemployment. To this end, many organisational settings can be identified as sites where policies are 'materialised'.

There is a rich and varied literature on the street level delivery of welfare and employment programs. This literature has provided accounts about the ways in which street level staff work to implement public services. This body of research, initiated by Michael Lipsky (2010) and colleagues in the 1970s analysed how public programs and policies are structured through organisational constraints and decision-making practices. This literature provides a way to analyse how street-level bureaucrats' routines, strategies, and modes of interacting with clients, colleagues, management and the public. In writing about the way that staff processed applicants, Lipsky shows how professionals working on the front-line of public service deliver manipulated welfare rolls, treated 'problem' clients, and formulated 'what policies mean in practice'. Instead of assuming that policies were reproduced from

legislative texts to delivery with clients, Lipsky and others showed how the organisational context, rules about the provision of resources and the ‘relative autonomy’ of staff from management produced variation in what policies actually looked like on the ground. Lipsky also suggests that street level bureaucrats produce accounts of clients in the process of shaping their ‘needs’ in order to make clients’ identities match those formulated for currently available programs. Haney (2002) has developed the notion of ‘client manoeuvrability’ to suggest how policy categories are negotiated in practice by social welfare officers. This notion suggests an interpretive flexibility in the categorisation of clients. Such a focus on the implementation of social policy has also focused upon the interaction between organisational cultures, record-keeping practices, case-load management techniques, resistance and refusal between clients and staff. This focus on street level activity can be used to highlight how staff strategies shape the materialisation of policies and the difference between what policies look like in the abstract and in concrete actuality (Ben-Ishai 2012).

This focus on the work practices in this thesis involves exploring the relationship between an individual’s professional status and sense of identity. Research in the sociology of work has pointed to the way that occupational roles and implicate the definition of professional identities, both in terms of their mandate to service clients. Research in this tradition has noted a split in welfare professionals’ identities. As Vincent Dubois (2010) has described, the bureaucrat has ‘two bodies’ – the *institutional* and the *personal* – which determine the character of the administrative encounters between staff and service users. Without an understanding of the specific roles that practitioners take in organising the delivery of interventions, and what practitioners do to make sense of activation, conditionality, compulsion, or participation as it is encountered in day-to-day work, researchers are at risk of producing generic theorisations. In order to do intervention work, staff are required to undertake a variety of tasks and activities which are specific to projects,



programs, and teams. Potential activities can include action planning and work-focused intake interviews, undertaking outreach work, assisting with job applications and interview preparations, overseeing CV clinics and drop-in résumé-writing sessions, boot camp-style weekend retreats, exhibiting and presenting at job-fairs, arranging case-loads and selecting clients to put forward for jobs (Drew *et al* 2014; Feurtes and McQuaid 2012; Hill 2013; Rees, Whitworth and Carter 2014; Yeatman, Dowsett and Fine 2009). This may also involve relations with other organisations by subcontracting specialist services from for-profit or voluntary agencies.

By drawing attention to the routine ways that government and delivery agencies workers undertake interventions, researchers have also focused on the ethos and practices of welfare officers ‘at the coalface’. According to Evelyn Brodtkin (2012), the value of this literature lies in the ability for researchers to document the ‘missing middle’ in policy implementation studies. This ‘missing middle’ encompasses the everyday work, interpersonal interactions, and organisational routines that contribute to the implementation of policy objectives. This policy implementation literature provides cues about the interactional and organisational strategies that street level bureaucrats share across the domains of education, welfare, legal, and other state services (Evans 2011; Evans and Harris 2004; Graauw 2014; and Taylor 2014; Proudfoot and McCann 2008).

Further research has indicated that the shift from welfare to workfare has also altered the requirements professionals in how they administer state services. Brodtkin and Marston’s (2013) collection of essays offers international case-studies which detail how a street-level perspective changes in the transition from public welfare assistance to a global workfare agenda. Through case-studies of the interactions between welfare officers and claimants, the authors assess this historic shift by considering how multiple forms of gender, sex, and racial biases are routinely unmeasured in the collection and analysis of standardized administrative

data and performance metrics. In another sense, other researchers have highlighted a tension around the privatization and marketization of employment services for the experience of street level bureaucrats (Greer & Symon 2014; Grover 2009; Hill 2013; Larsen and Wright 2014). Sandra Cullen (1994) has described how reforms to welfare and employment service during the 1990s reduced the relative autonomy of welfare officers. These reforms separated the administration of welfare benefits from employment support services which meant that officers who had previously processed benefit claims were no longer required to have tailored knowledge of job-search strategies or local labour market information.

Due to the contracting out of public employment services in the 1990s and the creation of ‘welfare markets’, the way that public services are delivered by a mixture of private, public, and third sector organisations, the implementation of employment interventions is also undertaken in different kinds of workplaces (Finn 2009). These organisations are contracted to deliver services by public agencies, such as payment-by-results of numbers of people placed into work, numbers of participants in job-search training programs, and so on. With the emergence of a large welfare-to-work market in the UK during the 1990s and 2000s, new methods have subsequently been developed to segment clients and to collect management information for monitoring the performance of both private employment agencies and clients. These segmentations differentiate clients according to their ‘employability’, or ‘distance from the labour market’. A recent House of Commons’ Work and Pensions Select Committee (2016) ‘Welfare-to-Work’ report, suggested introducing a new assessment and segmentation tool to better serve the interests of clients. This segmentation tool would differentiate between clients according to a number of factors, thereby differentiating what services to provide to which clients, according to their needs.

The administration of employment and training programs are conducted by an assemblage of partnerships between public and quasi-public bodies, such as local authorities,

national funding bodies (Education Funding Agency, Skills Funding Agency, and government departments), Local Enterprise Partnerships (in London, called the Local Enterprise Panel), consortia of business partnerships (such as Education Business Partnerships), and private and voluntary delivery agencies who work on delivering programs on the ‘frontlines’ (McQuaid 2010). In this landscape, which has been called a ‘funding “spaghetti junction”’ (Shaw Trust 2014: 27), making sense of the range of initiatives also requires considering how programs are given distinctive operational form in geographic locations through the work of practitioners working in teams, within specific organisations.

A study of frontline staff and claimants at a Job Centre in Scotland outlined some ways that unemployment policy is implemented on a day-to-day basis. Sharon Wright (2003) also described how frontline staff engage in informal, moral coding of clients as ‘wasters’, ‘nutters’, ‘numpties’. These informal labels were used to structure how staff make decisions about who to, and what level to, award benefits. Wright reports that accomplishing policy involves varied forms of appraisal and negotiation which creates hierarchical ordering of clients and influences how policy classifications are applied in particular circumstances. Other authors have further elucidated the strains experienced by jobcentre advisors ‘mediate’ the needs of both clients and managers, and the explicit attempts to control the conduct of clients (Bertram 2010; Dubois 2010; Du Gay 2000).

The introduction of market-based provision of employment service markets also poses practical and organisational questions about the relation between professional ethics, management reforms and the characteristics of public services. Del Roy Fletcher (2011) indicates that recent welfare reforms to the UK welfare system have introduced the requirement for street-level bureaucrats to administer mandatory work requirements with already disadvantaged groups. Catherine Durose (2011) has sought to provide a description of changes to the ‘front-line service ethos’. She draws attention to the way that public

services have transformed through local reforms and budget rescaling since the 1990s, she notes that the ethos of ‘assistance’ has been transformed into one of ‘civic entrepreneurship’ (Du Gay 2000). Despite the optimistic intentions of city officials, a reliance upon a market-based notion of ‘performance’ to assess administrative work has led to a redefinition of the state towards primarily facilitating economic exchange (Harney 2002).

Some authors have indicated how service delivery contracts and socio-economic pressures influences the quality of service provided by private sector employment agencies (Dias & Maynard-Moody 2007; Lewis *et al* 2013; Maynard-Moody and Mosheno 2012). They state that a ‘performance paradox’ results from both external and internal pressures on private agencies to deliver prescribed employment outcomes, diminishing the attention paid to some clients. This argument is reflected in another context where youth services are administered. Nina Eliasoph (2011) describes, what might similarly be called, an ‘impact paradox’ which pressurizes youth empowerment projects to prioritize ‘demonstrating’ rather than ‘delivering impact’.

The administration of public services also calls into question how administrators and bureaucrats exercise control strategies over the public. Javier Auyero (2012) describes how low-income residents in Buenos Aires have their lived temporalities controlled by social workers and welfare officers’ bureaucratic demands for documentary evidence that delays the receipt of vital, timely assistance (see also: Hirvonen and Husso 2012). Some have claimed that this engagement in queuing and the presentation of documentary evidence serves to compound already existing inequalities that policies and administrations were seemingly designed to address. Using the notion of ‘spatial images’, Tonkiss describes the way that Jobcentres express the proliferation of market contradictions by tying down human capital in dole queues (Tonkiss 2000: 123-124; King and Rothstein 1995). Writing about the delivery of employment programs in suburban Paris, Sarah Mazouz (2015) describing how staff

distinguish between clients and distribute resources on the basis of justifying who is worthy of support. Each of these accounts are exemplary in highlighting the multiple forms through which state services are structured through the everyday experience of accessing and administering these services.

Other authors have called for accounts that identify the ‘prosaic qualities of ‘the state’’ by connecting everyday practices and encounters (Jones 2012). Some authors have put forward the idea that employment interventions conducted by non-profit agencies form part of a broader assemblage of ‘containment’ strategies to locate young people in circumscribed economic relations. These strategies produce institutional contexts in which to train clients to ‘appropriately’ display affect (Eick 2007). Whilst others have highlighted practitioners have a unique institutional position in which to advocate for social justice, inclusiveness and diversity (Ahmed 2012; Foster and Spencer 2013). This exhibits some of the recurrent tensions between aspirations for social justice in the provision of public services and the way that the provision of state services may limit the autonomy of service recipients. The next section moves on to consider a specific aspect of administering state services, namely how service provision is organised through record-keeping practices.

As I will describe in the following chapter, ethnomethodology and the ‘studies of work’ tradition have contributed social studies of the organisation of work, employment and workplaces. Ethnomethodology has been broadly treated as emerging from an interactional tradition within sociology, and has been compared with both the Chicago school and symbolic interactionist approaches. Ethnomethodological studies of work focus upon the interactional organisation of work and occupational activities. It principally attends to the reflexive practices used to constitute that work and the endogenous production of social order. This involves a detailed attention to what Eric Livingstone refers to as the “phenomena of practical action and reasoning” (1987: 30). As Rouncefield and Tolmie’s (2011) recent

collection also demonstrates, a focus on ‘work’ in ethnomethodological studies does not limit its applicability to work outside of workplaces, but also include other sites where social groups undertake shared activities.

By focusing on the interactional organisation of work practices, ethnomethodological studies of work offer an alternate approach to the in sociology of work, employment, occupations and industrial relations. Indeed, comparing this tradition with the diverse field of research in the area of work and employment is a complex task. The field of research on work and employment encompasses studies which assess the importance of factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, life cycle on the experience of working life; a focus on labour market institutions and organisations, such as trade union groups, cooperatives, employment agencies and employment-support services; it includes studies about the historical emergence of new professional and occupational groups, or interactions between different occupational groups in the negotiation of minimum wage legislation; and studies which focus on the effects of globalisation on the creation of new transnational formal labour markets and informal economies, and the effects of new forms of international supply chains and teamworking arrangements (Abbot 1993; Watson 2003; Flores-González et al 2013). Into this mixture of approaches to the study of work and employment, ethnomethodological studies of work offer an approach which focus on, in one sense, the reflexive production of ‘everyday’ activities through the interactional, *in situ* organisation of work practices.

To highlight one way that such an approach is distinctive from other approaches in the study of work, it is instructive to provide an example. In a very clear sense, the ethnomethodological approach is distinctive by adhering to a methodological requirement that it not offer pre-formulated theoretical accounts about the nature or organisation of, for instance, either ‘the economy’ or ‘society’. This is in contrast to traditions which study work and employment relations by drawing from strands of research which emphasise, for

example, the importance of conflict and control in capitalist societies. Researchers working in the tradition of post-Marxist or critical approaches, for instance, can analyse the transformations in the labour relation by analysing broader structural shifts in the capitalist economy. These macrostructural shifts, such approaches may suggest, can give rise to emergent forms of employment relations as the economy undergoes shifts at a societal level, either from Industrial to Post-Industrial economics, from liberalism to neoliberalism, or from Fordist to Post-Fordist employment. These can then be treated as societal tendencies or trends.

Such an approach offers a frame of reference with which to analyse both macro-level shifts in the economy and micro-level conflict in the relationship between workers, management or the state. The approach then provides a conceptual lexicon with which to apply to any singular research finding or topics of research (see Sharrock and Anderson on the ‘collection of’, what these authors call, ‘pre-given *sociological* presuppositions *within which* it makes sense to talk of the work people are doing in such terms as the ‘working of the labour process’” [1993: 150].) This approach leads to social research which uses a set of *a priori* theoretical concepts, which the researcher insists are inherently relevant to the topic at hand. This approach preformulates the final analysis. It offers a ready-made framework within which evidence can be presented to support the validity of the theoretical concepts. This framework would suggest that, for example, researching NEETS would touch upon the way that employment relations have been restructured in an era of neoliberal capitalism. Other associated concepts could include: precariousness, flexibility, marketization, or informality.

The ethnomethodological studies of work tradition is alternate in the sense that it does not draw upon an *a priori* set of concepts with which to explain how society is organised in theoretical terms. It is distinctive in the way that emphasises the importance of studying the

distinct, situated practices through which members endogenously organise themselves. It does this by detailing the ‘accounting practices’ that members used within the settings being studied, and by orientating to production of ‘local’ social orders, does not seek to analytically describe these practices as the products of macrostructural shifts in the economy, culture or society.

## *2.7 Record-keeping practices in organisational settings*

In order to analyse how intervention work is organised, it is necessary to describe how interventions are documented, recorded and accounted for in talk and through record-keeping practices. These are routine ways that organisations make sense of their work. This involves focusing on what Anne Rawls (2008a) has called, ‘organisational accounting practices’. This points towards the necessity to understand the practical procedures through which official and unofficial reports are produced in the service of delivering policies. For example, in order to understand how interventions work is undertaken, it is necessary to describe how interventions into unemployment and youth cohorts are accounted for in routine data collection undertaken by state agencies whether through administrative records, case files, or in statistical reports.

The following chapters will describe the way that practitioners account for their work, and the institutional expectations that professionals account for their work using formalised reporting systems which are routinely audited and quality controlled. Given this general expectation within street-level bureaucracies and state agencies, it is important to consider the increased relevance of ‘audits’ and accounting practices to the culture of public institutions. Marilyn Strathern’s (2000) research on the topic of audits, accountability and ethics provides



one point of departure to consider how accounting practices transform public institutions. She outlines how 'accountability' can be treated as an object of study by anthropologists and social scientists. Whilst writing about recent transformations in higher educational institutions, she notes that there has been a cultural transformation which has led to new forms of governance being enacted through 'audits', which also leads to new forms of anxieties and resistance about these regulatory systems. The introduction of requirements for public institutions to account for their activities through 'audits' creates a new cultural logic which aims to 'ensure that internal controls, in the form of monitoring techniques, are in place' (2000a: 3-4). As the practices through which such audits are introduced into public institutions vary, scholars should interrogate to the new cultural and social logics that the variety of these practices produce. She writes that: 'auditing re-shapes the way institutions describe themselves, formal procedures of ethical practice often become attached to professional status' (2000b: 292). Strathern argued that the introduction of these new auditing requirements reveals the changing relationship between public institutions, the state and the emergence of 'accountability as an instrument of policy'.

In support of this argument Michael Power (1997) also analyses how the proliferation of auditing practices represents a new social logic and cultural attitude towards the governance of risk. Power shows that auditing practices, and the 'rituals of verification' that they entail, are the product of a shift in the way in which societies and institutions deal with 'risk'. He shows how during the 1980s and 1990s, auditing became increasingly attractive to different governmental and corporate groups. Its attractiveness stemmed from an ability to manage risk through the development of formalised and detailed checks about whether institutional accounts could be trusted. Through the introduction of new processes for checking such accounts, these auditors' methods of verification provided assurance of the validity of accounts. In this way the proliferation of auditing practices results from a

transition towards a ‘certain regulatory or control style which reflects deeply held commitments to checking and trust’ (1997: 7). Power indicates that the abstract techniques used to verify accounts also require situational judgements and interactions between auditees and auditors. In this way, social researchers can analyse how accounting practices are implicated within new systems of regulation, documentation and ‘verification rituals’, and the judgements used to conduct auditing work.

Analysing the role of documents and records in government agencies involves addressing the historical-political episteme of statistics, indicators and metrics which perform socio-economic realities (Abrams 1968; Çalışkan and Callon 2009; Desrosieres 2011). It also necessitates considering how cohorts and social groups are represented on database records that, in turn, is used to aggregate the total cohort as quantifiable ‘population objects’ (Mackenzie 2012). As with other knowledge-production practices, there is a particular configuration of professional and technical expertise, guidelines, normative expectations, and disconnect between the official and unofficial versions of how recorded data emerges through situated practice (Eyal and Buchholz 2010; Law 2010; Peneff 1988). Some authors have indicated that the introduction of ICT devices and the proliferation of databases requires renewed analysis of the intensification of regulatory surveillance on jobseekers and citizens more generally (Caswell, Marston, and Elm Larsen 2010; Cheney-Lippold 2011; Lemke 2001; Mackenzie 2012; Williamson 2014). Rather than valorising or dismissing these technologies as examples of the ‘burden of bureaucracy’, the use of these practices indicates another feature of how interventions and specific cohorts are organised through numerical representations.

Researchers working in the tradition of Computer Supported Cooperative Work have also provided insights into the interaction between technology and organisational practices within workplace settings, and how workplaces transition towards digital record-keeping

systems. Research in this area has focused on ordinary workplace objects, such as documents and case files, and the uses to which they are put. Christian Heath and Paul Luff (1996) approach this topic by describing the practical consequences of the computerisation of medical records for practitioners' daily use of those records. They note that the introduction of digital record-keeping systems produces problems of intelligibility and practical use for medical professionals. They note that the format in which paper records are 'reproduced' in digital form does not support many of the practical uses which are made of paper-based records. In this sense, they highlight the importance of attending to how practices of 'writing and reading of the paper record' depend upon practitioners' knowledge of how records are read, how they are put to use, and how they relate to other organisational expectations. Sellen and Harper (2002) have also written about the 'paperless office' in a study which details the range of workplace activities undertaken through the use of documents. These authors note that the introduction of new technologies within workplaces does not lead to obsolescence of paper within workplaces. Whether this involves 'marking up' documents, being able to 'hand over' documents, the use of paper provides for the organisation of collaborative work, in ways that digital copies cannot offer. As these authors show, the materiality of paper can support some work activities in ways that designers of digital record-keeping systems often fail to take into account.

Greg Marston (2006) has underscored the importance of considering information and communication technology's relationship to the provision of employment services. Marston suggests that researchers move away from the notion of 'street-level bureaucracy' towards one of 'screen-level bureaucracy'. Rather than seeking to find the most appropriate nomenclature for staff filling the occupational roles associated with collecting this information, it is necessary to understand the contexts in which this work is done, how this work is undertaken, and what methods are used to objectively verify how it has been

undertaken. Another consideration in play is how technologies are used in the collection of such information. With the introduction of computers and databases to manage records about government agencies, local authorities and private-sector delivery agencies, information technologies play an important role in shifting the modalities through which state action is documented (Agar 2001, 2003; Ajana 2013).

This topic has been addressed in studies concerned with the work involved in representing state agencies in files, dossiers, and reports in a range of public services such as the police, social work, healthcare, child welfare and benefit agencies (Gkeredakis, Nicolini, Swan 2014; Zimmerman 1969). The collection of administrative data is tied to the requirement to maintain organisational expectations about how service providers support citizens. Hugh Meehan puts forward the notion of the ‘running record’ produced through police officers’ ongoing contact with citizens. Meehan shows that a key part of police work relies upon the interplay between face-to-face encounters, interpretive frameworks, organisational procedures, professional culture, and case-files. He writes: ‘[T]he accounts that records render are seen as part of the very same organizational circumstances they are describing’ (1986: 98). He notes that these records are produced with a concern for maintaining organizational realities, even as their ‘facticity’ is reflexively orientated to by the expectation that they will be read by managers, other police officers, or members of the public. In considering organisational records, researchers have suggested that such organisational objects are constituted through specific methods of inscribing information to make specific versions of social realities observable and reportable. Max Travers (2007) has provided an account about the way quality assurance involves the routinely undertaking audit exercises. Rather than see these records, and the statistics generated from these records, as independent entities, such an approach highlights the interdependency of organisational practices and statistical records.

## 2.8 *Conclusion*

This chapter has presented a set of relevant literature about how public policy programs have been developed in order to address the social problem of youth unemployment and NEETs. The chapter has provided a historical context in which to understand how public policies have constructed the category of unemployed populations, and how public employment services and training provision have been organised in relation to policy categories. The chapter then provided insights from literatures that are critical of the way that neoliberal reforms to the provision of public services have altered the relationship between citizens and state. This literature was used to suggest that the organisation of service provision in education, training, and employment services is based upon the routine practices that professionals use when mediating the demands of front-line service work. The chapter concluded by indicating how sociologists have paid particular attention to the organisational settings, professional competencies and routines through which public policies are put into practice.

The following findings chapters will return to the question of what is involved in these professional practices by explicating how members of staff make sense of and organise the implementation of these interventions. The approach taken in this thesis will identify how undertaking interventions involves the skilful use of situated practices and technologies to collaboratively undertake activities associated with NEET interventions. The thesis will also contribute to this literature by providing a set of case studies that investigate how professionals in organisational settings put youth unemployment and NEET interventions into practice. The case studies will focus on the way that state-funded training and labour market interventions involve the coordination of professional activities between staff and across

agencies. This involves focusing on how ‘NEET to EET’ transitions are accounted for by staff in different organisational settings. This involves exploring: how professionals account for what these interventions are designed to do; how these professionals talk about and make sense of how to put policy designs into practice; what organisational procedures and constraints they treat as relevant to their work; what a clients’ status and identity mean for the organisation of their involvement in specific programs; how the outcomes of these programs are accounted for through record-keeping practices and reported; and, what types of activities members of staff are required to undertake on a routine basis in order to implement these programs. Our review of sociological and social policy literature raised these potential lines of inquiry in subsequent chapters. Rather than formulate a general theory about the experience of young people going through these transitions, the notion of ‘NEET to EET’ transitions will be used as a sensitizing device with which to explore the local, situated organisational work through which the topic of NEETs is treated by professionals in different organisational settings. The next chapter develops this through discussing the theoretical and methodological approach used in this thesis, as well as discussing how the research was conducted in different field sites.

### **THREE. Ethnomethodology and Ethnography of Interventions**

The previous chapter reviewed research on the organisation and delivery of labour market and NEET interventions. In doing so, the chapter explored some background considerations for studying the design and delivery of NEET interventions, active labour market policies, and employment-related services. These considerations provide an indication of how employment interventions are implemented. They point to the importance of economic, social, political and historical factors in the design and delivery of employment, training, and labour market programs. The present chapter addresses the theoretical and methodological considerations as well as the specific data collection methods used for this study. As already indicated, the thesis draws from ethnomethodology to explicate the practical work involved in the routine organisation of interventions. It seeks to highlight the interplay of professional skills, tacit practices, technical knowledge and routine actions undertaken by practitioners when accomplishing intervention work. In the following chapters, these conceptual starting points will be used to explicate the work of practitioners delivering a wage-subsidy project, local authority youth service staff delivering a traineeship program, local authority youth service staff collecting participation data, and meetings about young people's education and skills across London. In each of these settings, the thesis seeks to describe the practical work involved in implementing interventions and how this work is accounted for by members. This requires attending to a variety of organisational practices, how practitioners work with groups

of young people so as to deliver interventions, and how this work requires conceptualising how interventions should address these groups.

The following four findings chapters present case studies of the practical work involved in organising interventions. These interventions draw together a range of professional roles such youth workers, employment advisors, social workers, data officers, policy officers, local authority youth service staff, and so on. This list of roles does not correspond the term, ‘activation workers’ nor ‘employability professionals’ (Dunn 2013)<sup>2</sup>. In order to attend to the practical work involved in undertaking interventions, the thesis draws from ethnomethodological studies of work. This chapter will explain how ethnomethodological studies of work conceptualises the topic of ‘work’ through the activities undertaken by practitioners and professionals. Rather than drawing from a Sociology of Work and Occupations tradition that focuses on, for instance, historical struggles between classes of professionals and management, our approach attends to, what Harold Garfinkel referred to as, the ‘Missing Interactional What’ of work (Garfinkel 2002). The missing interactional what involves describing what professionals and practitioners actually do, what knowledge and skills are used to accomplish these actions, how these actions rely upon competent use of methodical sense-making procedures, and the interactional organisation of ordinary work activities.

This chapter takes these conceptual starting points and applies them towards answering four sensitizing research questions. Firstly, how are NEET interventions

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<sup>2</sup> The designation, ‘Employability Professionals’, as of 2015, was not recognised as an occupational category in the Office for National Statistics’ occupational classification. Since the establishment of the Institute of Employability Professionals in 2013 with a grant from UK Commission on Employment and Skills, efforts have been made to formalise the set of recognised qualifications and accreditation of employability professionals.



implemented in practice, in organisational settings, by practitioners? What ways do practitioners approach youth unemployment as a practical problem? What do practitioners do to organise their routine actions to undertake interventions with young people? And through what methods do practitioners account for their interventions within organisational settings?

In each of the following findings chapters, the thesis describes what practitioners do to make sense of how interventions should be organised, how they could be organised, and what actions they need to take to deal with contingencies that arise. The following chapters describe what staff actively do to make sense of their work with subjects of intervention, and how interventions are enacted through concerted actions, by applying rules and following guidelines, by making sense of subjects of intervention through story-telling and record-keeping practices. To provide an initial example of this work, when a staff member is working with a client and providing ‘employment services’ and ‘supporting a client with their CV’, this work involves conversational exchange between a staff member and client. When staff and clients are actually working on this hypothetical CV, they may make use of writing technologies, pens, paper, and a pile of certificates, they may talk with each other and make sense of the task in front of them. When doing this work, both may orientate to the context in which they are doing this work, recognise that they may have a certain amount of time to do this work, that they may have a deadline to complete an application or another client to meet, or that they have a quota of CVs that they need to complete this quarter. As staff members and clients take turns to formulate what to include on the CV, what the CV is for, how it should look, and so on, they produce a textual object through this work. This initial example points to the way that, in order to study the kinds of ‘ordinary activities’ that make up NEET interventions, empirical research into the details of what this work requires a methodological approach which can account for how members practically achieve work through courses of action.

### 3.1 *Ethnomethodology and the study of everyday practices*

Ethnomethodology, or EM, presents an alternate to sociological inquiries that treat the everyday world as unproblematic. EM offers an alternate approach that focuses attention upon the methods that members use to produce recognisable scenes through concerted actions in everyday life. This approach attends to the ways in which these concerted actions are treated as coherent features of social settings, how members of settings orientate to produce actions within concrete settings and how these actions are put into sequences and ‘courses of action’. A central set of questions in EM studies is about how members constitute social objects through these visible, witnessable actions, how those actions orientate are used to make sense of social scenes, and how these actions are orientated to by other members of settings. In short, it develops an approach that recognises the necessity for members to produce social orders through visible actions. As D Lawrence Wieder has described, EM’s focus on studying practices is concerned with the way that members orientate to settings through procedural practices that make settings intelligible. As he writes (1999: 166), ‘For ethnomethodology, actors, events or objects are understood as *procedurally* encounterable by whomsoever witnesses them, and hence are, in the first place and always, objects within a field’.

Historical accounts have described EM as an innovative and radical approach to the sociological study of communication, information, interaction, organisation and the constitution of social objects (Rawls 2002, 2006, 2008, 2017; vom Lehm 2013). As formulated by Harold Garfinkel in writings from the 1940s onwards, the sociological study of ‘social objects’ requires taking an approach which describes the constitutive practices through which these objects are produced and made publicly available to society’s members. These objects do not have a pre-social identity but are produced through communicational operations conducted through social interaction. These interactions are organised through the

coordination of social members' sense-making practices of objects in concrete situations. These practices are treated by members as an unnoticed, background feature of everyday sense-making which are relied upon to routinely organise familiar settings. These objects are produced as publicly observable through the practices that members use to make these objects intelligible. In this way the intelligibility of social objects is approached in EM studies through praxiological investigations of how these objects are constituted. In a paper written in 1948, Harold Garfinkel's 'The "red" as an ideal object', focuses upon how one such objects, the 'Red', or 'communist', is orientated towards as a symbol within a moral order. Through explicating how this category is used, the focus of Garfinkel's paper is on the procedures through which the category of 'Red'-Communist is treated as a category of person in a moral order, and how the device of 'Red' is routinely employed within interactions. In one sense this starting point offers an initial indication of the way that EM studies describe the shared resources and interactional work through which social objects are constituted through organising practical sense-making activities. It also shows the way in which 'Red' and other identities labels as constituted through shared language and reasoning practices. This is distinguished from social constructionist analyses of categories such as 'Red'-Communist. Such a constructionist framework could be used to produce critical accounts about the contingencies through which definitions of persons and social problems emerge within historical contexts (see Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Social constructionist accounts examine the way that social problems and categories of persons come to be defined by social actors through accounting for the agonistic deliberations, rival interest groups and power struggles over defining the nature of categories and social problems in specific ways (Woolgar and Pawluch 1985).

EM's analytic focus involves a detailed concern with explicating the tacit practices and members' methods which constitute 'naturally organised ordinary activities'. These

activities are not confined to textual phenomena or public debates but involve a wide variety of practical activities. As Eric Livingston has described, ‘the central issue and the central research problem is the examination of the unwitting, without extrinsic motivation, production of the ordinary social object’ (1987: 11). These objects are ordinary in the sense that they are reflexively and locally produced by members through concerted actions. These ordinary objects can include, as Livingston lists, ‘proving a theorem in mathematics, asking a question, bidding in bridge, spitting and swearing, making a discovery in high-energy physics, ending a therapy session on time, diagnosing a patient’s medical problem, bartering, making one’s way through pedestrian traffic in rush-hour Manhattan, doing magic, performing open-heart surgery, telling gossip’ (1987: 10). Each of these activities requires methods for their concrete, occasioned enacted production. In this sense, as Andrew Carlin writes, ethnomethodology ‘is concerned to explicate the methods that members routinely use to make sense of their social world and information around them’ (2016: 10). The variety of ordinary activities are each topics for potential inquiry in EM studies. These studies require detailed attention to the organisational practices through which objects are given situated intelligibility through visible, concerted actions. Such a starting point requires focusing upon the routine accomplishment of interactional practices and describing how practices are used by members to orientate to these objects.

EM studies require a research framework capable of addressing how social objects are treated as see-able, witness-able, recognis-able, know-able and account-able phenomena for members. As Anne Rawls (2005) has described in her reading of Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, the framework for studying ritual conduct requires that sociological research treat *practices* rather than *beliefs* as a primary phenomenon for sociological research. This involved treating social members’ witnessable, visible actions as constitutive of social life. Such an approach offers a challenge to sociological research which draws from

documents, texts and interviews in order to describe the organisation of social life. EM studies instead involve detailed inquiries into the observable practices, both talk and embodied conduct, that members use to organise ordinary social settings. Such studies seek to describe the *in situ* practices that members use within specific settings rather than *post-hoc* accounts of those practices. Such an approach aims to treat these practices as features of settings in which they were produced and as visible methods through which members make sense of social life by the production of concerted, witnessable actions. As scholars have also shown, such an approach has marked similarities and contrasts with other programs of research in sociology, such as interactionism, Goffmanian sociology, pragmatism and symbolic interactions (Dennis 2011; Emirbayer and Maynard 2011; Smith 2003; von Lehm 2013: 133-144). The focus of EM studies on practical action and ‘naturally organised ordinary activities’ aims to describe the orientation of members to the detailed, in situ production of practical actions through which social objects are endogenous produced through sequentially organised interaction.

This approach introduces an additional challenge to sociological investigations by turning analytic attention to topics that had been treated as ordinary, unproblematic phenomena. For Zimmerman and Pollner (1970), this requires turning common-sense *resources* into analysable *topics* for EM inquiries. These authors stipulate the methodological requirement to treat members’ accomplishments and tacit practices in specific settings as an ‘occasioned corpus’ of elements that are available for investigation. This ‘occasioned corpus’ can be analysed through attempting to reduce the taken-for-granted usage of an analysts’ common-sense resources.

‘By use of the term *occasioned* corpus, we wish to emphasise that the features of socially organized activities are particular, contingent accomplishments of the

production and recognition work of parties to that activity. We underscore the occasioned character of the corpus in contrast to a corpus of member's knowledge, skill, and belief standing prior to and independent of an actual occasion in which such knowledge, skill, and belief is displayed or recognised' (1970: 94)

As sociologists are required to rely upon their competent use of common-sense resources to conduct professional inquiries and necessarily take-for-granted that society's members have 'stocks' of culturally specific knowledge, they overlook how members use practical sense-making resources to organise specific settings. The question for EM studies therefore becomes focused upon treating these taken-for-granted resources – whether reasoning practices, membership categories, and so on – as topics for inquiries and investigating the procedures through which language, reasoning, logic, and order are produced in specific settings.

This approach requires explicating the procedures that members routinely use to make sense of social objects. These members are not 'persons', strictly speaking, but instead, competent natural language users. They are treated in EM inquiries as having, in short, a 'mastery of a natural language'. In this sense, professional sociologists draw upon their shared, competent membership and 'membership knowledge' to conduct sociological inquiries. As Paul ten Have (2005) writes, the notion of members 'refers to capacities or competencies that people have as members of society; capacities to speak, to know, to understand, to act in ways that are sensible in that society and in the situations in which they find themselves'. These capacities may be shared by members and analysts, both lay and professional sociologists. In this way the study of members' methods involves describing the practices through which phenomena are produced by competent members in specific settings, and how members routinely use these methods as a feature of organising these settings. Professional researchers are required to explicate how this knowledge is made available as an

available resource in sociological descriptions. In conducting EM investigations, researchers are suggested to examine the routine, recurrent ways in which members use cultural and linguistic resources to organise the intelligibility of social phenomena. Egon Bittner (1965) provides a notable contribution to this topic by arguing that the sociological study of organisations requires explicating how schemas, or ‘rational constructions’ such as the notion of *organisation*, are routinely applied to ‘objects, events and occasions relative to which they are invoked’. Rather than using ‘rational constructions’ such as *organisation* as an explanatory resource for professional sociological analyses, this argument suggests that the systematic use of rational constructions by members can be treated as a topic for analysis. As Edward Rose has also shown, the practice of conducting sociological inquiries is largely dependent upon the use of an ordinary language. This ordinary language, under his examination, can be treated as constituting a ‘natural sociology’ of concepts and terminological references (Rose 1960). This notion is further built upon by Read, Sharrock and Hutchinson (2012) who claim that sociological investigations are conducted as natural language inquiries which inevitably draw upon common-sense linguistic resources. These resources are routinely relied upon as the discipline of sociology does not have an idiosyncratic, technical language in which research findings are articulated. Each of these points thereby introduces methodological questions about how to conduct EM inquiries into practical action and members’ methods.

One starting point for conducting EM studies is to analyse how members account for social settings and how these accounts constitute the available features of those very-same settings. These accounting practices are recurrently used to display how members knowingly describe and report observable scenes in everyday life. This approach involves explaining the procedures through which identities, objects and scenes of everyday life are organised through accounting practices. For Garfinkel, ‘The central recommendation is that the

activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings "account-able" (1967: 1). A members' competence – that is, their skill, knowledge and ability – in producing accounts renders everyday scenes as account-able, or 'visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes' (Garfinkel 1967, vii). EM studies set out to analyse these accounts in the way that they are used to describe the available features of settings, and how members' practices of making sense of those settings accomplishes the intelligibility of those settings. EM studies propose to describe how accounts and accounting practices reflexively organise the intelligibility of settings in which they report. For EM studies, accounts and accounting practices have a 'constitutive reflexivity' in the sense that these accounts are used to organise the features of social settings. As Douglas MacBeth writes

'Rather than belonging to the exercise of professional analysis, ethnomethodological reflexivity points to the organization of ordinary sense and meaning—how order, fact, and meaning in everyday life are produced as practical objectivities, reflexively made of the social technologies for producing and detecting them (as in the production and detection of the at-risk, or gifted, student)' (MacBeth 2001: 49)

One area of focus for ethnomethodological studies is thereby on how members' talk and language is used to organise settings through accounts and accounting practices. These accounts are found in sequences of interaction where members accounts and counter-accounts are features of their involvement in producing ongoing activities. These accounting practices can, for example, be shown to display 'resistance' and 'non-compliance' with directives (see Hollander 2015). The examination of accounts and accounting practices also involves acknowledging that members' 'indexical expressions' are local devices for producing the situated orderliness of social settings (for more on 'indexicality' and 'indexical expressions', see Garfinkel and Sacks 1986). These indexical expressions are made



intelligible in reference to the contextual relevance of their use and how they elaborate features of these contextual settings. Members' accounting practices are in this way treated as consequential and display members' ability to make sense of how to display competent membership in varied organisational settings. As Anne Rawls has described, the study of sense-making practices also involves describing how the specific features of accounting practices are sanctioned affairs within organisational settings. For instance, in the case of administrative statistics, she writes

‘organisational statistics are not a measure of events in the world. They measure how an organization, as a context of accountability, orientate toward certain events, and how organizational works account for the contact they make with those events.’  
(2008: 716)

In this way, statistics, records, data, archives, files and management information are each produced given members' competence in 'contexts of accountability' (Gephart 1988, 2009; Meehan 1986, 2000, 2006). This approach can be used to describe how, for members of classrooms or courtrooms, for example, analysing how a context of accountability involve examining the specific talk and conduct used accomplish ordinary organisational activities.

Starting from the perspective that *talk* is a key way in which ordinary activities are organised, Diedre Boden made a significant contribution towards describing how it is used to produce business settings and organisational structures. In Boden's publication, *The Business of Talk: Organizations in Action*, she writes that whilst talk is such a ubiquitous feature of business settings, it is curiously under-analysed in sociological accounts. In this way, talk is key in the routine production of organisational actions. Talk – that is, *conversational practice* – ‘constitutes’ what an organisation is or could be. Boden shows that the fragile structure of organisations is constituted through finely coordinated action through sequences of talk. This

talks place in meetings, phone calls, water cooler conversations, and so on. She writes: “What people do – up and down the hallways and up and down the organizational structure, all day long – is *talk*, hence this study.” (1994, 23). EM studies of ordinary activities thereby require analysing the interactional work and practical actions which render a variety of social objects as intelligible, reasonable and accountable. This focus also requires studying the everyday practices attended to by members in the sequential organisation of talk-in-interaction (Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007). It requires describing members’ methods for producing actions through talk-in-interaction, how activities are produced as recognisable in talk, and how members’ talk organises social interaction. Instead of offering a lengthy explication of the relationship between Ethnomethodology, Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA), the thesis will use insights and relevant points of analysis in subsequent chapters (Heritage and Clayman 2011; Wieder 1999; Wolk and Carlin 2004). Recent debates about the seeming drift towards a state of irreconcilable differences between the programs of EM and CA research, efforts to revive an ethnomethodological ‘radical agenda’ as well as recent debates about the necessity for drawing a clear distinction between EM and CA, unfortunately fall outside the scope of this thesis (for examples of the two ‘sides’ of this debate, see Lynch 2016a, 2016b, Heritage 2017). In the next section we turn to describe a couple of examples of sense-making practices and how the topic of ‘troubles’ are taken up in EM studies as a methodological device for exploring the organisation of ordinary sense-making.

### 3.2 *Sense-making and ‘normal, natural troubles’*

Given the preceding starting points, it is clear that EM studies are focused on describing how social objects are produced through the enactment of shared practices. These practices are

visible in talk and conduct through which members produce social objects and have these objects recognised and orientated towards by other members. The investigation of sense-making practices requires attending to the way that members orientate to visible practices during interaction. These practices are witnessable in talk and embodied conduct. Given this, the study of sense-making practices involves analysing how talk and conduct are used within specific settings in order to organise how members, Carlin writes, ‘make sense of their social world and information around them’ (2016: 10). This then involves describing how sense-making and practical activities are get done in specific settings as a feature of those settings. Rather than presupposing the relevant unit of space in which members orientate towards in their organisational practices, the task of EM studies would be to explicate the practices which constitute the ‘social order of a place’. As Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls (2012: 68) show, this involves the explicating, ‘*what* people actually do, and *where*, and *when* – and seeing *how* “in context” what they do makes sense and accords with the local order – even though it may conflict with their expressed beliefs’. The way social objects are seen in context and the practices that members use to constitute these objects is therein studied through explicating what members do to treat these objects as coherent and intelligible.

This appeal to a ‘context’ is distinguished from sociological accounts that formulate an overarching socio-economic order, whether neoliberalism, neo-colonialism, post-industrial, and use that contextual frame as an explanation for observed phenomenon. The relevance of a ‘context’ is rendered instead through participants’ orientations in specifying the identity of settings. This places methodological limits upon, what Schegloff has referred to, an ‘academic imperialism’ that would impose a preferred theoretical definition of ‘contexts’ (Schegloff 1997). Contextual understanding is exhibited through members’ situated, interactional work practices. These work practices coordinate in shared expectations about how members should organise their everyday affairs. In David Sudnow’s (1967)

account of the social organisation of dying, we find how members of staff attend to bodies as an interactional accomplishment throughout the organisation of two hospitals. This involves describing how professionals treat the relevance of specific bodies within hospitals, and how these bodies are constituted as meaningful through the routine work practices of hospital staff. As Iddo Tavory writes, ‘meaning is constructed within interactional settings, in this just-thisness of the situation’ (2013: 126). The procedures for constructing shared sense and meaning requires members’ competence in formulating the relevance of place and space and context within the organisation of practical activities.

Another method that Garfinkel (1967) offers as an example of how members’ make sense of social settings is referred to as the ‘documentary mode of interpretation’. This method involves treating ‘appearances’ as ‘the document of’ an underlying structure. This involves the way in which members treat appearances, and objects seen in the course of everyday affairs, as related to an underlying pattern and a manifestation of social structure. By using this method, appearances are not treated as isolated, unique eventualities but as part of a broader pattern that are encountered in each specific instance. This common-sense procedure involves treating events as one-in-a-series of other events. Members, both lay persons and professional sociologists treat the appearance as a document which indicates an underlying pattern and social structure, which is then used to explain the object which is a ‘document of’. Appearance come to be seen to have a ‘retrospective’ significance in light of the underlying pattern that they are treated as ‘a document of’. In this way, this procedure accomplishes ordinary sense-making involves members’ treatment of appearances as documents which have some relation to, even correspondence with, an underlying reality. This common-sense procedure relates ‘observed appearances’ to a members’ knowledge of this appearance’s correspondence to a set of ‘assumption of “underlying” matters “just known in common” about the society’ (1967: 96). Reference to the ‘documentary mode of

interpretation' is, Garfinkel writes, a 'convenient gloss for the work of local, retrospective-prospective, proactively evolving ordered phenomenal details of seriality, sequence, repetition, comparison, generality, and other structures' (Garfinkel 2002: 113). This sense-making practice offers one ordinary procedure that members use to make sense of appearances and these appearances' relation to members' knowledge and assumptions about social structures.

One methodological strategy through which EM studies have sought to expose these ordinary sense-making practices has involved attending to the way that members deal with situations of disorder and troubles in routine sense-making. Such a methodological approach offers access to the way that members use talk and conduct to make sense of situations that are treated as troubling, troublesome, requiring remediation or repair. These situations of trouble offer insights into the way that members orientate towards the disruption of normative expectations about how everyday life is, can, may, or should be organised. It also relates to a research approach suggested by Harold Garfinkel, referred to as breaching experiments. Garfinkel's use of breaching experiments were used as a way in which to 'make trouble' in members' common-sense procedures for producing orderly, ordinary scenes. These experiments require asking, Garfinkel writes, 'what can be done to make trouble' in ordinary, familiar settings (1967: 37). The analytic pay-off from analysing trouble-making is found in the way that it 'tell us something about how the structures of everyday activities are ordinary and routinely produced and maintained' (1967: 38). Such analysis can be conducted on single cases so as to explore the moment-to-moment sense-making of troubles within courses of action and how these troubles are orientated through turns of talk (Whalen, Zimmerman and Whalen 1988). The analysis in the following chapters makes transcripts of talk available to readers as resources with which to follow analyses.

By disrupting the normative sense-making practices used within settings, breaching experiments make visible those actions that members routinely use to accomplish ordinary scenes. Garfinkel also commended attending to ‘normal, natural troubles’ in relation to the collection of records, such as in an Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic (1967: 186-207). These ‘normal, natural troubles’ occur ‘because clinic persons, as self-reporters, actively seek to act in compliance with rules of the clinic’s operating procedures that for them and from their point of view are more or less taken for granted as right ways of doing things’ (1967: 171). As troubles, they are generated from members’ requirements to act in compliance with organisational requirements but yet produce imperfect, faulty or “bad” records’ of the Clinic’s activities. In findings that troubles are routinely encountered by members, EM studies indicate how these troubles emerge from the way that members follow organisational procedures and rules in the course of producing records. These records, in this sense, do not simply represent organisational life, but are treated for practical purposes as ‘integral features of the same social orders they describe’ (192).

As a methodological device, locating how troubles are made sense of by members within commonplace scenes involves describing how taken-for-granted practices and assumptions are produced through social interactions. Robert Emerson (2009) has also commended the topic of ‘ordinary troubles’ for ethnographic inquiry. He writes that attending to these troubles can lend both credibility to ethnographic accounts by offering interactions that display the resources that members use to define and addressing the nature of ordinary troubles (see also Emerson 2015). This is also an approach that organisational scholars have sought to incorporate into their analysis of the way that ‘crises’ are treated by through public inquiries. Richard Gephart (2007) has described the practices through which ‘crisis sense-making’ is made meaningful and how the meaning of a crisis for members is orientated through practices of producing shared meanings about incidents, accidents and events. The

next section turns to bringing these considerations about EM study or everyday sense-making practices and troubles, with a program of research on ‘hybrid studies of work’.

### 3.3 *Studies of work*

The thesis will draw from a long-standing program of research in EM which is referred to alternatively as either ethnomethodological studies of work or as hybrid studies of work. This area of research continues a long-standing interest in the way that members’ *ad hoc* practices and *instructed actions* constitute specific workplace settings and amongst occupational groups. Anne Rawls (2017) has linked this long-standing interest in ‘hybrid studies of work’ to what ‘might be called [Garfinkel’s] first study of work’ written during his army service – ‘The History of Gulfport Field’ – on the training of airplane mechanics. The analytic focus on work practices and the situated organisation of work continues to be of central focus in the ongoing development of EM. Early research in this tradition offered detailed studies of work practices of professional and lay members. Garfinkel’s writings in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) offer examples of this program in the investigation of the work of coroners, an outpatient psychiatric clinic, jurors, and an intersexed persons. In the 1986 edited publication of *Ethnomethodological Studies of Work*, the collected studies of work practices included focus upon the regulation of motor vehicles, Kung Fu martial artists, transcribing lectures and alchemy. Recent collections about work practices have focused upon the organisation of professional activities such as calculation, meetings, documents, reading in workplaces and technology (Rouncefield and Tolmie 2011). In so far as these studies explicate domains of occupational and professional activities, this program of research offers a detailed, close analysis which demonstrates the local practices and orderliness that members orientate towards through undertaking practical activities. These

studies are ‘hybrid’ in the sense that they also seek to bridge the discipline of sociology and the specific discipline being studied. Garfinkel wrote that the initial beginning for such a program of study stemmed from Harvey Sacks’s ‘observation that the local production of social order existed as an orderliness of conversational practices upon whose existence all previous studies depended, but missed’ (Garfinkel 2002, vi). This involves explicating a ‘missing interactional what’ at the heart of studies of professional activities. This ‘interactional what’ refers to the way that professionals coordinate their activities around shared tasks through situated practical reasoning conducted in concert within workplace settings. The studies of work tradition has attempted to attend to the ‘order properties’ and the phenomenal details attended to in mastering the technical requirements for discipline specific activities, such as playing musical instruments and the videogame *Breakout* (Sudnow 1983).

Writing recently about this program of research, Michael Lynch has referred to Garfinkel’s ‘studies of work’ as an ‘improbable sociology’, in that it ‘might very well be *impossible* for all professional purposes’ (forthcoming: 2). For Lynch, this is due to the envisioned requirement of studying work as a competent professional in the field under study – whether mathematics, law or science – and the concomitant requirement to produce research findings that themselves would be of interest to the community whose practices are under study. For Garfinkel, this requirement for hybrid studies of work are about ‘competence’ in members’ methods. He writes, ‘A members’ method is both a careful\* description, and, as an incommensurable alternate, *and* interchangeably, it is situatedly tutorial’ (2002: 101). Research contributing to studies of work therein offers both ‘descriptions and instructions’ of these members’ methods.

An additionally relevant notion in EM studies is that of ‘re-specification’. This key notion of ‘re-specifying’ involved addressing familiar topic in sociology by finding and making descriptions about the way these familiar topics are treated as relevant in the routine



work of groups of practitioners, whether professional or lay. This requires finding 'perspicuous settings' in which familiar topics in sociology are encountered as a routine topic (for more on 'perspicuous settings', see Garfinkel 2002). This in turn requires attending to the way that these members treat potentially problematic issues in sociology through their specific worksite practices (see also Lynch's notion of 'epistemics' on the practice of 're-specifying' topics in epistemology, Lynch 1993). Rather than proposing to produce an abstract, general theory in order to explain the relevance of a topic, 're-specifying' instead offers scope for conducting detailed examinations of how familiar topics are treated by members as a feature of a specific social settings. Following such a methodological approach involved asking: how do participants orientate to this topic as a practical issue, and what practices members use to make sense of that topic within that setting? As Harold Garfinkel writes, any topic is 'eligible for re-specification as locally achieved phenomena of order\*' (1991: 17).

This notion of re-specification offers the possibility of using situated inquiries to describe social practices associated with seminal or canonical topics in the sociological literature and provide thereby detailed descriptions about the ways that social members attend to these topics as locally accomplishment of the work of members. This suggests that EM studies can provide a members' basis for phenomenon which is an approach that is overlooked in accounts which provide general, theoretical, non-empirical accounts. This respecification therefore requires that researchers attempt to learn from practitioners about what they do and the 'occasioned corpus' of knowledge that members used to deal with this topic through organisational practice.

This approach subsequently involves investigating the set of local practices that members use to accomplish workplace tasks associated with topics of inquiry. For members of workplace settings, their ability to get work completed involves 'shop talk and work'. This

talk is concerned with members observing the practical relevancies and contingent features of how ‘objects’ are seen within the course of conducting work tasks. This work is found in the “‘real time’ production’ that members attend to in completing daily tasks (on the notion of ‘real time’ production in scientific discoveries, see Garfinkel, Lynch and Livingston 1981). As Dirk vom Lehm writes, EM studies explore how ‘These everyday competencies and practices also allow scientists to revisit their work and materials, and thereupon revise the arguments that they originally used to explain their findings, if they encounter problems or even failures in their actions’ (2013: 124). In attending to the ‘real-time’ features of organisational practices, EM studies seek to demonstrate members’ ‘lived work’. This ‘lived work’ is found through the set of recognisable embodied, visible actions that community of practitioners orientate towards as intelligible, shared methodologies of reasoning and conducting situated inquiries (Livingston 1995).

By paying attention to the way that members encounter problems within workplaces in the process of putting plans into practice and following instructions, the focus of EM studies becomes one of describing how members talk about their situated reasoning and methods to make sense of how to coordinate their activities. One example of an approach that incorporates the practice of re-specification and ‘shop talk and work’ is Badouin Dupret’s *Practices of Truth* (2011). This text also offers an interesting set of examples about how to draw from the studies of work tradition in order re-specify a topic of longstanding interest to the sociology and the human sciences, ‘truth practices’. His study draws on video data, ethnographic field notes, transcripts of talk-in-interaction and shows how ‘truth’ is accomplished through concerted actions in varied contexts. It provides a basis upon which to investigate the phenomena through which members’ language practices situationally and interactionally accomplish ‘truth’.

Other research building on EM studies of work have sought to re-specify how professionals and laypersons use discursive practices and practices of ‘seeing’ to accomplish the relevance of situated activities. This has involved showing how members coordinate their actions through talk, embodied action, gaze, gesture and textual devices. A corpus of these ‘alternate’ studies is referred to in numerous settings (Garfinkel 2002: 125-133). One example of such an accounting practice is the use of the ‘convict code’. D. Lawrence Wieder (1974) describes how ‘the convict code’ is used by staff and residents in a halfway house as a flexible analytic resource that members use to explain actions and conduct. Wieder describes how he was given instructions about how to comprehend the actions of residents by using the code as an explanatory resources with which to explain their conduct. Charles Goodwin (1994) has also described the specific competencies and discursive practices that professionals use in the practice of ‘seeing’ artefacts and objects. This ‘professional vision’ is an achievement produced through ways that professionals instruct *how* to view objects, whether by ‘coding’, ‘highlighting’, or ‘producing and articulating material representations’. As professionals use practices to frame the perception of visual fields, these practices specify the relevance and meaning of events and observations as they are encountered. Practices of ‘seeing’ are also tied to members’ reflexive orientation to contextual relevancies. As Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) have shown, the act of seeing in an airport requires cultural competencies and knowledge of the orderly features of workplaces in order to make sense of visible scenes. Coopmans and Button (2014) show how the skills used to grade eye diseases involves situated enactments of expertise and tacit knowledge in ways of analysing visual fields. These competencies are displayed through the way that members make sense of systems of classification by using common-sense practices about how to apply abstract taxonomies in specific cases.

Additional programs of research have developed aspects of EM studies and ‘workplace studies’ about how members use various forms of technology, talk and social interactions within workplace settings (Button 1993; Luff, Hindmarsh and Heath 2000; Szymanski and Whalen 2011). This research program has focused upon the interactional workplace practices that members develop to make sense in the course of using technologies. Findings from these studies have contributed studies about the interactional and communicational practices that are integral to the design and use of information systems. The focus of this area of research continues to explore the ‘lived details’ commended in EM studies. The program of research also offers concrete cases about the way that members of workplace settings coordinate their activities through the use of media (such as video-conferencing technologies), talk, situated conduct, documents and other video technologies-in-use (Licoppe and Veyrier 2017).

In each of these treatments, the focus on studies of work involves attending to the organisation of workplace settings. They attend to the details of interactions through which this organisational work is accomplished. This close consideration of how organisational settings are produced through the methods that members’ routinely exhibit to produce sequentially ordered practices. As Llewellyn and Hindmarsh write, this requires that analyses display how members’ work treat the details of organisational concerns:

‘But when such authors do gloss some category of person, scene or form of organisation, there will always be an opportunity for an ethnomethodological re-specification that reveals ways in which members handle the practical and moral relevance of such delineations and, in doing so, find “organisation” in the details of ordinary work’ (2010: 23)

In the next section we describe how this focus on everyday practices, sense making, troubles and studies of work are incorporated into the research design for this thesis. This involves

drawing from ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and recordings of talk-in-interaction. The chapter concludes with a summary of the specific fieldwork settings in which research was undertaken and address the ethical and practical issues associated with gaining and maintaining access to organisational settings.

### *3.4 Ethnomethodology, ethnography and fieldwork*

The thesis will draw upon ethnomethodology to describe the practical action and methods that practitioners use to deal with routine troubles in intervention work. This research project will follow ethnomethodology's concern with members' methods so as to explicate how staff routinely deal with 'NEET to EET' transitions. This involved designing the research project to collect empirical details in relevant 'perspicuous settings'. Prior to starting fieldwork, it was necessary to ask the initial question about 'NEET to EET' transitions: "Who in society has the work of dealing with this problem as their daily work?' and then go and study how these people, as part of that work, encounter and deal with these problems' (Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock 2008: 110). This approach will be taken up in each of the following four chapters through case studies of practitioners situated activities and organisational accounting practices. This next section will specify the distinct approach that ethnomethodological studies take to ethnography and participant observation. The rest of this chapter will describe the research approach and data collection methods used in this thesis, namely audio-recordings of 'ordinary activities', observation, interviewing, collecting documents and texts. The chapter will conclude with an account about the ethnographic strategy used to collect data for each of the following four analytic chapters.

The thesis draws from a sociological and anthropological research tradition of participant observation for praxiological investigation. This approach aims to describe

members' practices and perspective of making sense of social worlds. Such an approach can be used to explicate, in Max Travers words, "the processes that matter inside institutions" (Travers 2001: 72). For this thesis, these are the organisational interactions through which members use routine procedures for conducting their intervention work. In the anthropological tradition, there has historically been a close relationship between participant observation and the writing of ethnographic monographs. Notwithstanding critiques made of the association between anthropology, ethnography and the 'othering' of ethnographic subjects, there are additional critiques of ethnography as a mode of research and presentation (Hammersley 1990). The approach taken in this current thesis is to draw on this ethnographic approach in order to write about mundane processes and everyday practices within organisational settings.

One set of critiques about ethnographic research has focused on the Chicago School tradition in anthropology and sociology. This critique emerged from writers working on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. These authors suggested that the ethnographic tradition in anthropology, namely ethnographies produced in a 'Chicago School-style', whilst providing scenic descriptions, fail to describe the very practices that ethnographies document. One aspect of this critique claims that anthropological ethnographies overlook the actual practices that members use in favour of citing details about a 'surrounding context' – be that 'institutional', 'social', 'economic', 'cultural', 'geographic' – that gives meaning to interactions, language and conversational practices (Schegloff 1991). Rather than relying on contextual references as an explanatory strategy, the thesis follows an approach that advocating staying close to the details presented in data so as to explicate mundane practice (for more detail on the 'limited affinity between conversation analysis and ethnography, see Maynard 2003: 64-87). Such an analysis attempts to describe, as Schegloff writes, 'how that event was achieved in its particularity... produced by some *specifiable practices* of conduct'

(2007: 252). Instead of ‘glossing’ over the particularities of practices in favour of producing a general diagnosis, such a critique suggests that ethnographies explicate the ‘lived details’ that members orientated towards in their work practices.

Ethnomethodological critiques of ethnography have also focused upon the manner in which Chicago School-style ethnographies use accounts drawn from interviews with ‘native informants’ without explicating how these accounts are interactionally accomplished. As David Silverman summarises, Harvey Sacks’ critique is that ‘most ethnography depends upon generalisations made on the basis of truncated data extracts and/or responses elicited from informants’ (1993: 52). These truncated data extracts are, Sacks argued, largely unexamined as interactional, sequentially produced phenomena. The Chicago School of ethnography, in this appraisal, involves the collection, presentation and analysis of interview data in terms of their ‘exemplary’ status as reporting informants’ experience. Although a contrast between Chicago School ethnographies and ethnomethodological studies highlights the difference areas of emphasis between these two approaches to qualitative research, participant observation and ethnographic monographs are frequently used in ethnomethodological studies of work. This thesis takes up Sacks’ critique so as to contribute to a tradition of ethnomethodological ethnographies that has explored public institutions such as schools, hospitals, law courts, coroners’ offices and government agencies (on ‘ethnomethodological ethnography’, see Travers 2001: 62-82). Each of the following chapters seeks to develop such an ethnographic account of the familiar objects, ordinary activities and work practices that members recurrently orientate towards.

The approach taken in this thesis also requires the development of an ethnographic strategy that acknowledges how social research is produced in practice, and acknowledges the extent to which ethnographic texts based on observation can offer detailed and systematic analysis of social phenomena. It is clear that in the following chapters that the level of detail

offered only provides ‘documented conjectures’ rather than systemic collection of a large corpus of audio-visual data. Such audio-visual can be used to provide highly detailed descriptions of the situated conduct and workplace practices studies (for a collection of studies that use audio-visual data, see the collection edited by Szymanski and Whalen 2011; for more on ‘documented conjectures’, see Garfinkel 2002). The following analytic chapters draw from fieldwork across different organisational settings to produce a description of how practitioners organise their work practices, what this work involves, and how this work was found during the process of attempting to become competent in organisational settings where this work took place. In this sense, the ethnographic approach will draw on a variety of data sources – interviews, audio-recordings of team meetings and public events, field notes from observations with staff, analysis of administrative documents – in order to describe *how* practitioners organised ‘NEET to EET’ transitions through coordinated practical activities. In each of the chapters I also take up the theme of ‘troubles’ as a methodological device to describe the sense-making practices that members of staff use as routine features of their work. These troubles are moral and practical matters that interrupt a ‘natural attitude’ towards everyday life. In each of the following chapters I seek to describe how intervention work requires dealing with such troubles in courses of action that are treated as organisationally relevant affairs (Emerson 2015; Jefferson 2015).

The practice of participant observation and writing up fieldwork into a ethnographic accounts of field settings also constitute key features of this approach to research. Since the 1980s, anthropologists, sociologists and literary scholars have identified how ethnographic texts as texts and written accounts are a specific form of cultural object. The ‘Writing Cultures’ debates in anthropology offers some indication as to how the very writing of ethnographic accounts and authority is achieved through literary effects (Clifford 1983). As James Clifford argued, it is necessary to recognise that ethnographic writing and texts are



cultural objects that do not represent an already-existent world, but reflexively produce claims about cultural groups through literary and visual conventions (Clifford 1986). Michael Taussig (2011) has presented an interesting challenge to debates about the supposed ‘textuality’ of anthropological fieldwork notebooks by showing how he uses drawings, pictograms and images.

Such debates are not solely about the best or most appropriate repertoire of methods, but open up a set questions about how ethnographers move between distinct phases in the completion of ethnographic projects: such as between ‘developing a strategy’ to ‘data collection’, from ‘data collection’ to ‘analysis’, and ‘analysis’ to ‘writing up’. Describing how ethnographers move between these phases offers scope to consider how fieldwork ‘becomes an ethnography’ (Gubrium 2009). This requires that ethnographers address what strategies can and should be used in ethnographic texts and account for these strategies within textual accounts. This issue is not limited to the way in which ‘ethnographic authority’ and ‘being there’ is described in ethnographic texts, but also involves the way ethnographers identify themselves in relation to the culture and social actors being studied, and how ethnographers account for the authors ‘positionality’ in relation to new social and cultural objects by using experimental modes of writing (Marcus and Cushman 1982; Morton 2005; Stoddard 1986).

In a related sense, this requires that ethnographic texts account for the role that researchers take in relation to members in field settings and in written accounts of fieldwork. Pollner and Emerson (2003) offer an assessment of the varied strategies that ethnographies account for how researchers achieve ‘participation’ and ‘observation’ during fieldwork. They suggest that participant observation requires practical activities for being visible in fieldwork settings, and reporting how ethnographers were ‘doing observer’ and ‘doing observed’ in written reports. These roles are not predetermined prior to entering research settings, nor are

they fixed during the course of fieldwork, but are an embodied, open to revision, observable aspect of conducting research. They remark that these local identities are produced through competent, mundane interactions. These interactions are undertaken given a background understanding that a researcher's interactions have the potential to affect ongoing and continued access to organisational settings. In Val Gillies' ethnography of internal behaviour support units, the author describes the process of moving beyond 'participant observation' towards 'groupwork'. For Gillies, this shift in how she described her relationship to the field involved the recognition that, rather than the need for devising elaborate data collection strategies, 'the most important insights during the project came from simply spending time with the young people' (2016: 36). I will return to this theme in the following chapters to give specific examples of how participation in organisational settings, or 'simply spending time', was routinely orientated to by myself and other members.

Other authors have suggested the importance of using ethnographic accounts to account for changes within global economic systems, the profound transformations to identity through processes of globalisation, the proliferation of developments in technoscience which transform the reproduction of cultural systems, and critiques of the notion that the field site boundaries should be determined by geographically considerations (Faubion and Marcus 2009, Fortun 2012). The forcefulness of these appraisals suggests that the value of ethnographic participant observation partly lies in the ability to reinvent the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork, and its associated textual report, so as to address emergent cultural, social, economic and political realities (Nader 2011). The implications of conducting participant observation within settings is shaped by a set of considerations. These considerations are not limited to the ethical stance or political commitment made by researchers to advocate for fieldwork subjects, address social injustices with powerless groups, or to focusing attention on under-studied, powerful social groups (Nader 1972;

Scheper-Hughes 1995). For other authors this requires making clear that the researchers' role is to take up a critical stance in order to contribute anthropological or sociological interventions in public debates about injustices enacted by the state, public institutions, the market, or social policies (Auyero 2012; Dubois 2010; Fassin 2013).

Debates in sociology and social science also pose practical and theoretical considerations. These practical considerations comprise such mundane matters as procedures for ensuring access to organisations, ethical regulation of conducting unstructured observation in organisational settings, gatekeepers' demands, keeping participants and organisations informed about the potential implications of research, and restrictions in funding for open-ended data collection, and so on.

As mentioned in the introduction and earlier in this chapter, each of the following case studies follows an ethnographic strategy so as to provide an account of the activities that members of organisational settings use to organise 'NEET to EET' transitions. In this way, the ethnographic focus of the thesis is to explicate the practical activities that members use in specific settings. The four analytic chapters in this thesis take up this starting point and an ethnomethodological approach to the study of work to describe the routine work practices that members use to organise these transitions. Participant observation is an important data collection method for this approach in as much as it provides access to the practical activities that members use to do this work, and also provides occasions where members could show and tell me about how they did their work. These provides opportunities for 'demonstrations' and to collect explanations about why they were doing a certain activity in a particular way specific times. To this extent, the observations that I draw upon in the following chapters draw from fieldwork in different settings, where I collected audio-recordings, conducted interviews, attended meetings, collected documents, and attempted to find occasions to observe the practical activities of members of staff. Having outlined the methodological

approach taken up in the ethnographic chapters, the following section describes some epistemological considerations of using these data collection methods.

### 3.5 *Ethnographic data collection*

The thesis takes up an ethnographic approach towards data collection which principally involved conducting participant observation in different workplace settings. By taking an ethnographic approach to this topic, I aimed to collect materials with which to describe specific work practices that members displayed in the course of undertaking ordinary activities. As ethnographic research involves bringing together different data collection methods in order to produce descriptive accounts, it is important to recognise some general criticisms of ethnographic research whilst acknowledging the value that field research can bring to social research.

Although ethnographic research does not necessarily entail conducting either, for instance, long-term participant observation or fieldwork interviews, it has traditionally required approaching social research by prioritising a members' point of view about the organisation of social life. I principally take up an ethnographic approach in this thesis in order to provide multiple perspectives and data sources about the phenomenon being studied, and to offer the possibility of using different kinds of materials and documentary evidence to address this topic of research. By taking such an approach I attempt to offer a richer, more complex description than would be offered through either solely interview or quantitative-based studies. Additionally, as ethnography is a technique of research, it is important to take stock of, what Tim Hallett and Gary Alan Fine (2000: 613) describe as, the "recognizable improvements in ethnographic methodology" since the start of the twentieth century. These improvements involve recognition of the role of researchers' normative judgements as well as

explicitly detailing the limitation of the methodological and data collection strategies used in fieldwork. Taking stock of some of the critiques of ethnography also allows for a clearer articulation of how specific set of methods are used in this research project.

One strand of critiques of ethnographic methods centre on the ways in which ethnographic descriptions seek to represent social reality. Martn Hammersley (1992: 44) has written about a tendency for ‘naïve realism’ in ethnographic descriptions whereby ethnographies claim the right to be able to ‘see behind the curtain’ of social life. Hammersley refers to the way that ethnographic description often relies upon an ‘representative model’ (1992: 28). This model takes for granted that ethnographic descriptions can, according to a ‘naïve realism’ stance, objectively and neutrally depict social actions, scenes and experiences. Hammersley argued that taking such a naïve realist stance can lead to the production of descriptions which operate as a ‘vehicle for ideology’. Instead of taking a ‘naïve realism’ approach to ethnography, Hammersley advocates for a ‘subtle realism’. One of the main arguments in support of this position is that ethnographic descriptions should not claim to ‘represent’ reality, but emphasise that social research produces representations from specific ‘points of view’ (1992: 50-51). The upshot of such an approach is to detail this point of view and its relevance to both the overall methodological approach and the substantive findings. In this way, Hammersley suggests that ethnographic descriptions need to be analysed according to the way in which claims of validity and relevance are represented in ethnographic texts.

Whilst this critique presents a challenge to ethnographic projects, it also offers an opportunity to be reflective about the ways in which sociological descriptions are used to constitute findings within ethnographic research. The approach I take to writing ethnographic descriptions in the following chapters attempts to focus on how members routinely produce accounts and how these accounting practices are used to organise social settings. When I draw from fieldnotes about observed activities, I attempt to support these observations with

descriptions given by members about these activities. This approach does not claim to 'represent' reality, but to explicate the practices through which 'realities' are reflexively produced in the course of organising ordinary activities. This reflexivity is a 'members' reflexivity which cannot be remedied through sociological explication or translated into 'objective', context-free terms (Slack 2000). Instead, what the thesis seeks to offer is a description of how the reflexive properties of these accounting practices are 'essentially tied to the activities of which they are a part' (Livingstone 1987: 29).

A second strand of critiques about the use of ethnographic methods involves identifying problems in the use of specific data collection instruments, namely the 'sociological interview'. In general terms, this involves questioning how social researchers use data generated by so-called 'informants' and how theories are produced on the basis of the contents of this data. Social researchers have demonstrated the way that all aspects of social research, for instance the coding of research interviews are organised as social interactions (Housley and Smith 2011). In terms of research interviews, Aaron Cicourel (1964: 73-104) provides a canonical example of work in this tradition, pointing to the way that fieldwork interviews are interactionally produced through the use of common-sense knowledge by both interviewer and interviewee. As he shows, the 'achievement of meaning' in interview interactions needs to be studied as a social organised phenomenon in its own right, in order to identify the inherent 'problems' – such as epistemological issues in the use of common-sense measurement scales by respondents – and also to indicate the implication of its frequent usage as an instrument in social research. Hester and Francis (1994) also contribute to an understanding of research interviews as 'interactional events'. By analysing the way that interviews are sequentially organised through talk-in-interaction, these authors point to an understanding of research interviews as not simply about 'information transmission', 'knowledge exchange', or the collection of pre-existent data which needs to

‘accessed’ using the most appropriately phrased question. Instead, their analysis suggests that the interaction between interviewers and interviewee should be analysed in its ‘local, practical organisation’ (1992: 692).

In this way, a research approach which draws upon ethnography and interviews needs to consider how interactional practices are inherent features of these two methods of conducting social research, and how these practices are relevant to the constitution of ethnographic research projects. In the following chapters I present extracts from interviews, I then attempt to analyse how members use their accounts as sense-making practices and the ways that members undertake particular kinds of activities through the use of accounts. By doing so I aim to highlight the practices that members use to account for social settings, without privileging particular points of view as singularly relevant, representative or comprehensive. These practices could be through the use of instructions, stories, complaints, evaluations, reminiscences, comparisons, and so on. By analysing these accounting practices, the thesis aims to provide an explication of how members organise the intelligibility of social and institutional settings, and offers a members’ understanding of the relevance of different events, identities, and ‘normal’, everyday occurrences routinely encountered in the practical work of NEET interventions.

*Audio-recordings of ‘ordinary activities’:* Each of the following chapters draw on transcripts produced using audio-recordings undertaken in organisational settings. These audio-recording will be used to analyse the practical activities that members of staff orientate to as a routine feature of working on ‘NEET to EET’ transitions. I also draw from relevant findings from the richly varied field of conversation analysis in the following chapters. In keeping with a prerequisite for reporting research in conversation analysis, I have included transcripts of audio-recordings to offer materials for analysis. These transcripts can be used to offer a detailed analysis of how members use turns at talk to produce recognisable actions in

a context of talk-in-interaction. These transcripts provide detailed materials with which to analyse how members interact in order to make sense of ordinary activities. Michael Lynch offers a useful advisory comment about how these ordinary activities should be approached for analysis. These activities are, he writes, ‘built up and made publicly intelligible through temporal, retrospective-prospective, orderings of actions in concert and in sequence’ (2002: 533). Seen in this way, the use of transcripts presents the possibility for inspecting how speakers undertake their work through reasoning about events, objects, process and people, and how this talk is used by speakers in order to structure workplace activities (see also Lynch, forthcoming). The transcripts presented in the following chapters will also draw on relevant findings in conversation analysis to explicate the sequential organisation of ordinary activities. These transcripts also offer scope with which to describe the language practices that members use to structure interactions in ordinary conversation and workplace talk (see Arminen 2005; Heritage and Clayman 2011; Schegloff 2007). Ethnographic studies can also complement conversation analysis in order to produce descriptions of the way that ‘local troubles’ are identified, dealt with, and organised through spoken interaction (Maynard 2003).

*Participant and non-participant observation:* This thesis also draws upon observations with members of staff in different organisational settings. These observations were undertaken during different durations of fieldwork. As Emerson and Pollner (2003) indicate, ‘doing observer’ is actively produced through interactions in specific settings. During fieldwork I sought to record contemporaneous field notes of activities being undertaken by members of staff. I mostly took these notes either during periods when I ‘shadowed’ and ‘went along’ with members of staff or whilst I was in office spaces in buildings where members of staff were based. Shadowing is a long-standing method within ethnographic fieldwork that allows researchers to understand the varying settings in which



research participants undertake their work (for a description of ‘go-along’ as an ethnographic method, see Kusenbach 2003). It thus, as Trouille and Tavory write, ‘reveals the way that people move through social life, and how such movements are followed by shifts in meaning and selfhood’ (2016: 10). This does not require that researchers be mute witnesses, through the practice of conducting observation ensures that ‘ethnographer and participant are simultaneously spectators and actors on stage’ (Gill 2011: 129).

My strategy for undertaking observation initially involved trying to make sense of what routines members of staff tended to follow on a daily basis. Following those routines, and how those routines were seen to be done, involved identifying how members of staff described and worked through the requirements for those routines. This involved initial discussions about what kinds of meetings, interviews, paperwork, and so on, needed to be done on a daily basis. There are a number of ‘rules of thumb’ and adages about how to conduct observations and collect data in fieldwork. These involved how and what to take note of, how to ‘take in’ surrounding activity, how researchers can and should position vis-a-vis ongoing activities, and how seemingly trivial details can open up vital research questions (Button and Sharrock 2009: 83-87). As Button and Sharrock note, ‘There is always something going on even if it is “life as usual”’ (2009: 83).

*Interviewing:* As previously mentioned in relation to Harvey Sacks’ criticisms of Chicago School ethnographies, it is important to explain how data collected during interviews is actively constructed by interviewees and interviewers. These interviews provide ‘glosses’ on work practices, and how those practices are themselves accounted for. I use extracts from these interviews as well as stories and accounts produced in interviews. Whilst ethnomethodology and conversation analytic studies use interviews as a data collection method, the emphasis is on analysing the practices whereby interviewees and interviewers use language practices and knowledge of social structures to produce recognisable actions

(for an alternate approach to interviewing, see Suchman 1990). In the following chapters I focus on extracts from interviews in reference to a number of practices, such as the use of membership categories, complaints, explanations, anecdotes, story-telling, appraisals, and so on. In this way, an ethnomethodological analysis of interviews focused upon how social objects such as ‘the self’ are produced through situated action (Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Baker 2001; Roulston 2011).

*Documents and texts:* The following chapters also include extracts from administrative and organisational documents that members of staff used in their routine work. In the following chapters I use these documents, either to illustrate what standard forms are used in association with specific activities, or to analyse how members of staff produce these documents using descriptive practices. Undoubtedly, the production and use of texts, documents, archives, and written artefacts, and the competent use of these constitute a key feature of organisational life. What is important in this respect is how documents are treated as ‘texts-in-use’ (Watson 2009: 5).

As ethnomethodological studies have shown, documents are prevalent feature of organisational life, they can be used to provide a richer analysis of the way that members accomplish organisational work (Hartwood *et al* 2011). The analysis of such documents needs to be relevant to the way that members use these documents to accomplish activities (Carlin 2003). The relevance and role of organisational documents can be found in the way that members make sense of how to use them, what they should be used for, and what ways information is sought from or for such documents. These documents are one of the ways in which an organisation constructs social reality and represents itself (Harper 1998; Smith 1974). These documents are prevalent and relevant objects that can be used to elaborate, in John Heritage’s terms, how members go about ‘maintaining institutional realities’ (see Heritage 1984: 127-231). Administrative documents can be used by researchers to analyse

how an organisation represents itself, how texts are composed to produce intelligible meanings, and the arrangements of visual imagery and textual commentary included in such documents. They can be analysed using a variety of analytic methods: content analysis, membership categorisation analysis, discourse analysis, semiotic analysis (Silverman 1993: 59-89). The following chapters combine analyses of the way that documents are used in routine work activities. During fieldwork I sought to collect relevant documents that members of staff use to organise their routine work, namely standard administrative forms, activity worksheets, board papers, publicity materials, spreadsheets, induction packs, and so on.

### 3.6 *Analytic strategies*

In order to analyse the materials collected in different field sites, I used a number of analytic strategies. In general terms, these strategies involved inductively analysing data in various stages: during the course of participant observation; whilst transcribing and organising the collected data; whilst analysing fieldnotes and transcripts of talk; and in the course of writing up draft and final versions of findings chapters. The overall strategy in analysing this data involved describing how members organised their activities in relation to the overarching topical focus of the research and my initial research questions. My initial focus on the work practices used to organise NEET interventions led to focusing the analysis on particular ‘ordinary activities’ within each setting. As the analysis set out to identify, describe and document the practices that constitute what ethnomethodologists refer to as ‘naturally organised ordinary activities’, the aim of the analysis involved producing precise descriptions of the distinct, important activities that staff in each setting routinely dealt with (Garfinkel 2002, Livingstone 1987).

My approach to analysing this dataset involved identifying and describing these ordinary activities so as to give rich detail about the practices that members used to attend to these activities. In contrast to studies which seek to identify themes within interview data, my approach instead involved identifying activities which members treated as relevant to their daily work. By doing this I sought to provide descriptions of the kinds of activities that members recurrently participated in and to provide a variety of data to give evidence of how these activities were organised. These activities were the many daily tasks, commitments, obligations and requirements that staff undertook in fulfilment of their work. They were accounted for by staff as an ordinary feature of their day jobs.

Although the data was analysed after completing the participant observation and data collection, I was able to outline some initial starting points with which to begin this analysis in the course of fieldwork. Although much of the data was analysed after completion of the fieldwork, it is important to note that some of the ordinary activities which came to be of particular interest in the final findings chapters, such as ‘registering clients’, were topics which members emphasised as being recurrently relevant to their work. These starting points were made available by reflecting upon my experience within specific work settings and what it was that members routinely did. More starting points were offered during the course of securing access when gatekeepers indicated the kinds of activities that I could and should observe in each setting.

Another important consideration in the analysis of the data involved gaining a close familiarity with the contents of the data. My dataset included data in a range of formats: fieldnotes, interviews, administrative reports and documents, audio recordings of talk-in-interaction. As my dataset was varied, it was necessary to undertake the task of becoming familiar with its contents by reading, listening, transcribing and writing research memos about what might be interesting topics to write about for each findings chapter. As other

researchers have emphasised, the process of transcribing and gaining an understanding of the contents of interviews, and other talk-based interactions, itself constitutes a key stage of analysis in social research (Bolden 2015). Early on in the research process I also decided to present materials from the fieldwork settings in four separate chapters. This decision allowed me to produce findings chapters which could describe the range of distinct activities that members in each setting orientated towards.

In the course of analysing the materials collected through fieldwork, I read through ethnographic field notes and transcriptions of meetings and interviews. At this stage I began to produce initial categories with which to organise small collections of observations and to identify what kinds of evidence to present to support these observations. These observations focused on specific kinds of activities and documented notes about what was involved in these activities. Early in the research I had started to draw up lists of what kind of ordinary activities should be the focus of each chapter. I then sought to determine what kinds of evidence I could collect about these activities. In doing so I aimed to describe the actions undertaken by staff, as well as *when* staff undertook these activities, *who* undertook these activities, and *how* these activities were accounted for by staff. These were the starting points for analysing the ordinary activities that constitute intervention work. This analysis requires attempting to provide an ‘insiders understanding’ of the intelligibility of such activities, and explicating how these activities were endogenously organised by members in these settings.

Some preliminary categories of activities could be evidenced using field notes. This involved focusing in on ethnographic field notes that had been collected over the course of a number of days of observation, and identifying how some categories of activities were ‘one off’ doing my fieldwork, such as graduation ceremonies as in Chapter Five, or daily requirements. In doing so I sought to gather together and create an order out of a ‘messy’ collection of notes and data, and identify materials with which I could describe the

organisation of ordinary activities as *sequences of events*. I then sought to analyse this data by identify the actions that were being undertaken, describe relevant shared understandings of the contexts in which these activities were undertaken, and identifying additional evidence, either as transcribed audio data or documentary sources.

The findings chapters also focus on how staff members use talk-in-interaction to organise their work practices. My approach to analysing this data involved undertaking detailed analyses of the conversational practices that members use to organise this work. In general, I sought to identify sequences of talk which would vividly demonstrate the kind of work that members undertook within, for example, team meetings. I do this by drawing from transcripts of talk-in-interaction where I analyse the turn-by-turn organisation of staff members' work practices. I cite some relevant sources from the literature on conversation analysis where this adds to the analysis of the sequential organisation of members' practices. The sequential organisation of talk is, as Button and Sharrock (2016) recently argue, has been the principal contribution that conversational analytic approaches have made to the study of social interaction. By focusing in on the turn-by-turn organisation of social interaction, the analysis in this thesis aims to explicate how members coordinate their work and produce their ordinary activities. In the chapters I also draw from a strand in conversation analytic research about collecting and analysing audio-recordings of talk-in-interaction as well as the importance of producing detailed analyses of single cases (Schegloff 2007; ten Have 1999). As Clift and Raymond (2018) have recently noted, the analysis of collections of audio-recordings has been a key methodological feature of research in conversation analysis. (An additionally important consideration for analysis is to ensure that transcripts are made available in the body of the text so that readers can check the coherence of the analysis.)

This approach to analysing the data collection aimed to describe how members undertook different forms of social actions in organisational settings. After having completed

transcripts of interviews and other audio data, I sought to identify particular activities that could be discussed within findings chapters. I then looked through other transcripts to see if other examples of these kinds of activities could be identified. For example, in Chapter Seven, how members discussed the topic of ‘pieces of work to be done’ that members of the groups could and should consider undertaking. By collecting a set of cases I sought to identify further cases where this topic was discussed within meetings. I then sought to write a detailed explicated of what was being done by members in each of these cases. In the thesis I also sought to provide an analysis of these transcripts by supporting these observations with materials collected during ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and interviews. The analysis of transcript data, interviews and ethnographic field notes also required paying close attention to the way that members produce actions, how these actions are used to coordinate their ordinary activities, how members use talk-in-interaction to produce intelligible actions, how turns of talk are treated as consequential within sequences of turns, and how these activities relate to broader requirements and obligations activities. In the following findings chapters I seek to apply these principles to analyse what is interesting, significant about how members organise their ordinary activities in relation to NEET interventions.

### *3.7 Case selection, access and ethical considerations*

This section will provide details about how the field sites were identified for research, the process of securing access, and any ethical considerations that were identified prior to or during research, either by myself or by participants. The initial starting point to identify organisations that were involved in the delivery of service contracts to provide education, training or back-to-work programs for NEET and unemployed young people. The range of ages which refer to ‘young people’ of post-secondary school age when funding

unemployment and NEET focused programs seemed to generally range from either 18 to 21 or 25. 18 to 25, or 18 to 21. However, this is dependent upon agency policies as to whether 18 or 19-year olds will be part of a ‘mainstream’ employment or NEET program. For reasons for convenience and practical availability, I sought to gain access to organisations based in Greater London so that I would be able to allow for repeat visits to research sites. For reasons of theoretical interest, I used demographic statistics to identify a list of London local authorities which had a higher than city-average level of youth unemployment, higher than average levels of black and minority ethnic populations, and scored highly on multiple deprivation index (Aldridge *et al* 2013). I assumed there would be more likely to be programs in these local authority areas focused on youth unemployment. I also anticipated that studying service organisations in neighbourhoods that were characterised as having multi-ethnic demographic profile would result in a more diverse service user population. Although I compiled this list of local authorities with these characteristics, I decided early on that I would make clear to gatekeepers that I would anonymise the name of any organisation, their staff and the location where they operated. In the course of preparing access and designing the research plan I consulted the BSA Statement of Ethical Practice to identify particular ethical concerns. I address some of these in the following section.

My initial attempts to secure access proved difficult. I initially attempted to gain access to a Jobcentre Plus for participant observation. After contacting a number of jobcentres in the Greater London area and being invited to contact regional managers, I was told that I would require ministerial approval prior to conducting any such research. I also contacted a number of private providers in Contract Package Areas for the DWP’s Work Programme. I was able to have informal interviews with members of their research or policy teams but was not granted access. I also sought advice about how to gain access through



telephone calls with staff from the main industry bodies for the employment services and training sectors, the AELP and ERSA.

After these initial conversations and suggestions about how I might contact providers, I was able to identify a number of organisations that delivered employment services for local authorities. It was clear prior to gaining access in the locations for Chapters Four and Five, that there would be restrictions on what kind of access I could secure. My initial plan was to anonymise and treat information that I collected as ‘confidential’. However, it is clear that such a practice is determined by the specific procedures through which anonymization and confidentiality are produced as a linguistically constituted phenomenon (1999: 146-302). The process of changing transcripts so that identifiable details are removed also changed the reported data. As Andrew Carlin writes, ‘Changing the name embedded in a sequence of talk alters the sequence itself’ (1999: 248). I took specific steps to ensure that sensitive information is made confidential in subsequent chapters. This includes modifying field notes and transcripts to make specific references to names and places indecipherably vague. This involved the removal, or the substitution of, names in transcripts and documents which directly refer to the names of companies, clients, employers and locations. Although Wiles *et al* suggest that decisions around confidentiality and anonymity should consider the ‘best interests of research participants’ (2008: 427), these interests may well clash. Given these initial considerations, I turn to a description of the specific access arrangements and ethical issues raised during fieldwork.

### *3.8.1 Chapter four: ‘the Network’*

As I decided to change strategy by contacting local authorities and organisations that delivered employment programs for local authorities, I identified a number of companies who

provided 'job shop' style services. Some of these provided a combination of daily job-search sessions, tailored employment programs for target groups, CV training and job-search workshops, and job brokerage services. In November and December 2014 I contacted these employment services and tried to facilitate access.

My initial emails to senior staff members explained that I was a university student currently conducting a research project exploring how employment services were provided to young people. I indicated that I would be interested in spending time with staff, shadowing their work and attending meetings. I received a response from a manager at the Network and was invited to a meeting in February 2015. At this meeting I was asked about what I proposed to do and give a fuller description of my background. I explained that I was looking to spend time shadowing staff, and to potentially conduct audio-recordings of team meetings and meeting with staff and clients. I handed her an information sheet and consent form about my research, which included contact details of academic supervisors if they had any concerns.

The director provided a brief history of the Network, how it had been put together in the mid-2000s after being invited to coordinate service providers in the borough. She talked me through an organisational chart, crossing off names and projects whose contracts had ended, explaining the profiles of existing and other new projects. I was told that another university student had conducted research in the organisation a few years ago. The director told me about different client groups that programs were designed for, and about other social welfare organisations in the neighbourhood that they partnered with. She told me that they had three projects for young people. She suggested that I get involved with the new one. I was told I would need a Disclosure and Barring Service form, which I already had. I was told that I would need to ask permission from staff if I wanted to conduct recordings, and that it might be difficult to do so with clients as some of them may not be agree. I was told that I

would be able to start on a new project that they had been commissioned to run, and was given a background about how that project fitted into the Network's activities. I was then introduced to the member of staff who was going to run this project and again explained to her about the research. On this basis I began to be showed around the organisation, introduced to new members of staff and maintained access on an ongoing basis. In this way I did not sign an agreement with the Network about the exact research plan, and was told to liaise with the project manager and make sure to contact the duty manager to inform her what days I would attend.

During February in 2015, and then from June to December the same year I attended the offices on approximately 30 occasions. Over the course of the fieldwork I spent time in the offices during different days of the week, different times of the day, off-site visits to employers and prospective employers, to local authority offices, and to workshops run by councillors about the provision of educational and training services in the local authority. During this time there were three main recurrent set of ethical issues, concerning clients, staff and organisational requirements.

Firstly, interacting with clients: Although I initially planned on conducting recordings between members of staff and client groups, I came to decide against this analytic focus. As I began fieldwork I began to sit in during meetings with staff and prospective clients. These meetings were registration and action plan meetings, where staff would run through a couple of administrative forms and process a new client's application. When I was invited to join these meetings, I was either introduced by members of staff who would also ask permission for me to join their meeting. If the new client accepted, I would explain that I was not a member of staff, but a university student –staff sometimes referred to me as 'my colleague' – and would give a brief description of my research topic. I offered an information sheet about the research and said I would be anonymising names in any final written work. These

meetings tended to last around 20 to 30 minutes, during which I took handwritten notes. There was a second group of clients that I interacted with whilst at reception. This occurred most frequently on occasions when I was shadowing reception staff. In this role, my interactions with clients were limited to clients who entered the team offices for general jobsearch support and some of the specialist programmes. As my fieldwork developed and I began to know more members of staff working in other teams and with other client groups, I was also invited to sit in on meetings and cover meetings that staff could not attend. On these occasions I again explained my status as a researcher and gave background information about why I was in the office and assured them they could ask me to leave if they wanted to as I was not a member of staff. Lastly, as Chapter Four will explain, staff used their knowledge of the client groups to make decisions about whether to put some people forward for roles. As I had begun to know some clients through meetings, I was also invited to voice opinions about them. This was a trickier issue as I was being asked to make comments that could be potentially consequential about their involvement. There seemed to be a general expectation that I was there to ‘observe’ and sit in on meetings rather than to take on the status of a member of staff.

Second, interactions with staff also raised ethical issues. As the project team changed over the course of my fieldwork and I was introduced to new members of staff as they were recruited and assigned to work on the employment project, I sought to provide full explanations of what I had hoped to do with the research project and my time with staff in the offices. I would provide an information sheet that would explain this. I would also invite them to ask any questions and say that if they did not want me to sit in on any meetings that I would happily leave the room. It was also at the discretion of members of staff whether they would invite me to attend the offices on any day. I explained to members of staff that I wanted to observe their work, and that if my presence was unhelpful or a distraction then it

would be understandable if they asked me to leave – as they did on a couple of occasions. As mentioned, I wanted to be able to follow staff in their daily routines so I wanted to make sure that staff understood that I was willing to forego access if required. In order to facilitate access, I was not given a fixed schedule by the director or members of staff. This meant that I would contact members of the project via text or email to arrange times to attend. To the extent that my ongoing involvement in the office was dependent upon the willingness of staff to invite me to attend meetings, I also began to feel obliged to undertake small tasks in the office to justify my presence: proof-read CVs and covering letters, make teas, go out and buy coffees. Additionally, I conducted audio-recordings of staff meetings. Prior to recording I sought verbal consent from members of staff, who already had information sheets about my research. I conducted audio-recordings of three weekly team meetings and a small selection of other, ad hoc meetings between staff. Copies of these audio files were stored on the same password-protected hard-drive.

Lastly, there were also ethical issues raised by my continued presence and my involvement in different parts of the Network's activities. There were two main occasions this was made relevant. When staff offered access to these different parts of the organisation, it became a more relevant matter that I be given 'permission' by management staff. On one occasion I was working with a member of staff on a set of CVs and covering letters, and was given a batch of them to check, proof-read, make comments on, prior to them being sent to an employer. The member of staff thought they needed to check with management before I did this. The director then requested that I sign a confidentiality agreement which stated that I would not share any information about my time in the organisation. I queried the meaning of this with the staff, who then relayed it to the director, as the very purpose of my presence there was to collect and write about my time in the organisation. I was told that it did not matter and that they understood. This requirement to sign a confidentiality agreement also

suggests that a researchers' ethical obligations are not made in a vacuum when conducting research in bureaucratic settings. Indeed, researchers are obliged to show they are meeting organisational procedures as a regular member of staff. The signing of the confidentiality agreement could be seen as a way to integrate me within the sphere of moral obligations expected of a member of staff.

### *3.6.2 Chapter five: the NEET traineeship*

This chapter reports on a short-term period of observation with a team of youth workers delivering a 'NEET traineeship'. It involved observing the day to day operations of members of staff and brought me into contact with program participants, aged between 16 and 20. I initially contacted the project manager in 2015 to request an informal meeting to discuss the possibility of conducting research with the program. In retrospect, as with the Network, an alternate and more straightforward approach would have involved approaching the youth service as a volunteer. The youth service already had a clear set of procedure for recruiting 'volunteers' to assist in youth clubs throughout the borough, and such an approach would have facilitated access in a quicker fashion.

Given the way that I initially contacted the project manager, explaining that I wanted to conduct research with the NEET program, different considerations came to follow. After receiving initial agreement to participate with the research project, I was invited to contact the service manager. I emailed this service manager and presented an overview of the proposed research project, who then requested a fuller summary and research plan to make an official request to the local authority officer in charge of approving research requests. This post had been vacant for a number of months. After a couple of months of delays, phone calls and emails, I was invited to submit an application to become a 'youth service volunteer'. I

was told that the local authority would need to apply for a new Disclosure and Barring Service check on my behalf. In December 2015 the project manager and I worked out a tentative schedule of days I could attend the NEET traineeship offices for their activities. We agreed that I would attend around 15 days from December 2015 to April 2016. I selected a mixture of days where trainees were doing employment-related activities, i.e. CV writing workshops, and when other activities. This plan was subsequently revised after the employability tutor resigned in January, prior to the new program getting fully up and running, and the originally planned schedule changed on a day-to-day basis.

Notifying young people who were participating in the program involved two strategies. As I had initially planned to conduct audio-recordings of sessions conducted by the employability tutor, I had prepared consent forms and information sheets for staff and trainees. I had these forms prepared and gave them to the member of staff to distribute as required. This did not end the necessity to keep new young people joining the program informed about my presence in workshops. I also sought to explain to trainees that I was a student and conducting research about this program. In this sense, researchers have a dual identity in educational settings, when researchers can be identified as a member of staff due to their perceived age and status. although they may also be identified as not full members of staff due to their limited organisational duties and responsibilities. As a volunteer and researcher, with a different reason for attending these sessions, I explained to trainees that I was going to be writing about my time at the centre with the traineeship program. I sought to give assurance that I was going to be anonymising names in any written reports. I also sought to explain that I could provide further information about this if they asked, or speak to other staff if they had concerns about my presence in sessions. As the chapter does not seek to analyse the group of trainees' conduct, and mainly focuses on how members of staff made sense of the identity of trainees, there is limited cause for ethical concern that the research has

not endangered the well-being of participants. In the write of this fieldwork, he names of participants and the location of the study has been anonymised.

In terms of the specific materials I draw on for the chapter, I draw on a number of sources. During the research I audio-recorded two interviews with the project manager and an information officer in the local authority head offices, conducted informal telephone interviews with the youth service manager and the one of the architects who designed the building, and had ongoing discussions with members of staff and trainees during my visits to the traineeship offices. I used field note books to record my ongoing impressions of the activities in workshops and in the office by taking contemporaneous notes of staff members' discussions. I present these notes in the chapter in abbreviated form as their accuracy relied upon my ability to quickly jot accurate notes about these activities and how members of staff talked about the group of students. During the research I also sought to produce fuller analytic fieldnotes in between visiting the traineeship program offices. I also collected relevant administrative documents and other written materials used by members of staff. Future research could be used to more systematically record the activities being analysed in Chapter Five.

### *3.6.3 Chapters six and seven: youth services and London Councils*

The last two analytic chapters are based on ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, observations and audio-recordings collected from a number of different settings. The materials used for Chapter Seven are based on audio-recordings conducting during attending both board and Operational Sub-Group meetings held by the membership organisation, London Councils. Some of the other interview and observations materials were gathered through contacts made with members of staff who supported the NEET traineeship from



Chapter Five. I also conducted interviews using a snowball sampling strategy to identify a total of seven youth workers and other local authority youth service staff for one-to-one interviews, and one group interview with four people, which appears in Chapters Six. In total I conducted seven interviews, one repeat interview, and one small group interview. I contacted workers via email to ask for informational interviews based upon finding names on web-forums, on posters placed around libraries, through recommendations from informants, and through meetings at public events and London Councils meetings. I was also invited to attend meetings at local authority offices through contacts made at London Councils meetings.

For the interviews, I prepared a short list of topic and questions for these interviews which were mostly free flowing discussions about staff members' work. On some occasions this involved members of staff showing me specific practices they used to conduct this work. This involved being brought into offices, shown around, introduced to colleagues, and talking through how records were kept about interventions and youth work. Prior to these interviews I told staff that I would be anonymising any identifying names and locations in my final thesis. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

For Chapter Six, I used two other strategies to collect materials. Firstly, I conducted desk research and located monthly M.I. reports from a private company, '15 Billion Education Business Partnership. I downloaded all of their reports from two of the local authorities they provided management information services for in the East London sub-region. I also conducted a Freedom of Information request to 32 London local authorities about the enforcement of aspects of the Education and Skills Act 2008. I requested information about the number of fine, penalty notices, and enforcement actions taken regarding young people who were not participating, or were currently employed without being enrolled in an approved form of educational or training program.

For the data collection for Chapter Seven, I conducted audio-recordings of five meetings held by London Council between 2015 and 2016, informal interviews with members of staff, corresponded via email with a couple of members of the Young Peoples' Education and Skills Board and Operational Sub-Group, attended the 'Skills London' annual careers event on two occasions, and attended an annual London Councils event, 'London Summit'. The audio-recordings of these meetings which forms the majority of the empirical content presented in Chapter Seven was cleared by a member of staff and board members in advance of attending. The member of staff called me to ask about information about my institutional affiliation, what I proposed to do with the recordings and requested that I write a short summary of my research project to circulate to board members prior to meeting. At the meeting I introduced myself and gave a short overview of my research project and what I hoped to do given my research with the group. These meetings lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. Prior to these meetings, members of staff circulated an email notice that I would be attending and recording the meeting and asked if anyone had any objections. No one objected to my recording proceedings. I did not contribute to the discussion during meetings, though occasionally I was addressed in the course of discussions when members would say they 'may need to hear that again'.

### *3.7 Conclusion*

This chapter has presented a number of topics related to the methodological approach taken in the thesis. Firstly, I have explained the theoretical approach taken in the thesis, namely ethnomethodological studies of work and sense-making practices. This involved explaining the distinct approach taken to studying work practices. This section sought to ground the thesis in a tradition of research which highlights the practices that members use to make

sense of everyday events, occurrences, identities and relations. In this way the thesis looks to explain how these practices, in John Heritages' terms, 'maintain institutional realities' (1984). The thesis takes up such an analytic focus upon interactional practices to allow for a detailed account about how 'NEET to EET' transitions are organised from the perspective of members of staff in a number of institutional settings.

The chapter then moved on to discuss the ethnographic approach and data collection methods used in the thesis. I described some relevant debates about how ethnographic research projects are conducted, contemporary debates about conducting participant observation and fieldwork, and how ethnographic data can be used to produce account about the details of organisational practices. The chapter concluded by describing the selection of cases for the thesis, access to field sites, and ethical issues raised by conducting research in these settings. The next chapter moves on to the first of four analytic chapters. It begins by focusing upon how an employment project for young people. The chapter pays particular attention to the documentary practices that members of staff use to make sense of troubles arising in the course of implementing the wage-subsidy project for NEETs.

#### **FOUR. Documenting Troubles on a Wage-Subsidy Project**

The 1975 film *Welfare*, directed by Frederick Wiseman, depicts how New York City residents and relatives, welfare agency workers and supervisors, police officers and community workers, make claims and counterclaims about accessing public assistance. Staff talk with clients about their cases, sending them upstairs to the Employment Department or around the city to other welfare offices. One client speaks to a worker after a tribunal hearing, asking about cheques that they have yet to receive. ‘But I been coming back here every day for two weeks. Like she said, get a notarized letter for this, a notarized letter for that.’ The worker says, ‘Get the application group. Applications.’ The client replying, ‘Yes. Yes. Yes’ (Grant 2006: 110). The film shows staff reiterating current policies and interpreting documents, finding names on welfare rolls and making directions about what steps to take to access public assistance. These exchanges bring forth one aspect of the relevance of administrative records, forms, documents and paperwork in accessing state services, and how, in the above quote, notarised letters and cheques are used in administering such services.

The chapter takes this starting point to describe how members of staff use documents and texts to account for events while delivering an employment project focused on NEET residents in an inner London local authority. The chapter describes how documents feature as

objects in structuring the work practices undertaken by members of staff. In this way the chapter describes how staff implemented this NEET intervention through accounting for troubles encountered in routine documentary practices.

This chapter focuses on the methods that team members use to document employment interventions associated with a wage-subsidy project for NEETs aged 16 to 24<sup>3</sup>. The chapter focuses on how staff organised their work through documenting interactions with clients on administrative reports, registers, and records. The chapter thereby treats the wage-subsidy project as a site from which to describe the procedures through which staff are instructed to account for their work. The following examples describe how members of staff's documentary practices are used in the course of implementing activation policies, accounting for the provision of public services by private agencies and are used to organise the delivery of employment related services for young people (Auyero 2012; Brodtkin and Marston 2013; Gatta 2014; Eick 2007; Miller 1991).

Documents are used during each stage of implementing an employment intervention and give coherence to organisational features of delivering public service contracts. The examples presented in the chapter shows how administrative forms are used in the process of 'becoming unemployed' (Griffin 2015: 109-124). They create a paper trail for researchers, clients and staff to follow. The chapter shows the necessity of considering the interactional practices and organises through which these documents feature as 'texts-in-use' during intervention work. The chapter approaches the topic of documents in organisational settings within ethnomethodological studies of work by explicating the documentary practices used to

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<sup>3</sup> In official documents supplied by the Network, the main characteristics for participation in the program included: not in full-time education or training; registered with the Jobcentre as unemployed; aged between 16 and 24; work less than 15 hours a week; live within the local authority area.

implement labour market policies, employment intervention projects and employment-related services (Drew 2006; Harper 1998; Hartswood *et al* 2011; Zimmerman 1969).

These methods of documentation are topics of practical concern for companies bidding for national government contracts to deliver employment and related services. As a manager of a prime provider in the DWP's payment-by-results Work Programme told me in an interview, producing documents, whether responses to bids for tender or monthly reports, is a routine work task for staff when bidding for contracts. In this first quote, he describes the company's investment in a workforce of sixty people with the capacity to produce time-sensitive responses to calls-to-tender.

You usually get eight weeks to do the work, and you talk about us bidding for about eleven or twelve locations, so you've got a lot of stuff going on. The bid team is about sixty people. Five bid writers, who are professional writers. So it was probably a four million pound investment to win the work. So that's what you put up at risk to bid big contracts.

Once contracts are awarded, successful bidders are then contractually required to produce monthly reports to commissioning agents. These reports are fairly standardised, he said.

'What form would the report take?' I asked.

It would report on our performance in terms of number of claimants who had engaged in a process, number who were actively job-seeking, number who were at interview stage, number who had been successful through interview in that month, number who were into employment, number who were between nought and six months of employment, number who had progressed through six months of employment, because that's when you get your first payment. That's an important day for us. And the number who moved on to get what they called "sustainment", for keeping people in work longer, for up to two years afterwards. Well, eighteen months afterwards.

In addition to reporting this quantitative management information, these monthly reports include what he called a ‘beautifully written’ narrative component.

Because we made it available in the public domain, because we’re totally transparent, it would be very complimentary and supportive of our subcontractors. It would herald the success of those who are at the top of the table, league table, and it would advise about all the important and amazing things that those who weren’t quite at the top of that table were doing to be there next time. So it was very, very enthusiastic and encouraging for them. It presented a very good picture of our intent. So it wasn’t too creative, it was, you know, factually accurate.

The production of bids for tender, claims for payments-for-results and monthly reports with narrative components are each written in reference to the demonstrable ‘performance’ of this company. Their teams of staff are responsible for documenting front-line service staffs’ work and how they are achieving contracted outcomes. These documents enumerate and narrate the delivery of contracted outcomes and employment interventions. These reports acknowledge the need for ‘transparency’ by enthusiastically describing the work of the prime provider’s subcontracting partners. Though these reports tell an *official version* of events, these brief quotations also suggest another initial characteristic of intervention work: the ability to organise documentary accounts about delivering employment programs that can be used to demonstrate ‘enthusiasm’, a ‘good picture of intent’, ‘factual accuracy’, ‘complimentary’.

The rest of the chapter describes some routine troubles encountered in the course of producing documentary records. The chapter brings these considerations out by examining documentary practices staff in the Network are required to use to account for their intervention activities. The chapter describes how staff used these documents to register and refer clients, write quarterly monitoring reports, and put forward clients for ‘live vacancies’.

#### *4.1 Documents, Files and Records at the Local Authority Jobs Network*

The fieldwork for this chapter took place with staff working at the offices of a council-funded network of employment services, anonymised in this chapter with the pseudonym, the ‘Local Authority Jobs Network’, and referred to in the rest of the chapter as ‘the Network’. A private company delivered a contract from an inner London local authority to provide a ‘one stop, job shop’ service and co-ordinate a network of employment projects and voluntary sector agencies who provided job-search assistance and specialist employment projects for ex-offenders, single parents and young people. Whilst the office used the local authority’s branding, the day-to-day management of the network co-ordination was run by a private company and the desks and meeting rooms were shared by around fifteen agency staff and up to twenty staff from partnered organisations, such as the DWP, NHS, charities and third sector organisations.

The chapter focuses on the methods through which the employment agency’s work was documented through record-keeping practices by staff running one project focused on 16 to 24-year-old NEETs. These routine record-keeping practices occupy a central place in project implementation. Staff exchanged documents with clients in order to elicit information about their eligibility and labour market history, as well as presenting clients with documents that list the Network’s expectations about their conduct, attitude and behaviour. In these ways, routine interactions between staff and clients are partly observable through the exchange of documents produced in the course of project implementation. The chapter will go on to show how staff discussed clients’ job readiness, adherence to the network and project policies, as well as recounting clients’ actions as grounds for making assessments about their suitability to become candidates for vacancies.

In order to understand how activities are undertaken on the front-line of service delivery, it is important to note that documentation practices are used to record specific



interactional events that are contractually required in the course of the front-line work. For instance, wage-subsidy staff were required to ‘action plan’ new clients. This meant that once staff had completed an ‘action plan’ meeting, this meeting was recorded on the client’s entry on the Network’s database, the ‘Network Register’. In this way staff record which individual clients have received which services. These services, and the records of these services are documented on the Network Register, comprise the principal set of records kept about how staff work with clients. Records of these interactions are subsequently consequential for evaluation and monitoring conducted by management, staff, and commissioning agents in the local authority. Client records, workplace conversations and shared knowledge each provide a resource that staff draw upon to make sense of cohorts registered with the agency and the wage-subsidy project, and a means for ensuring that staff are ‘keeping to task’.

One way to understand how this record-keeping constituted a sense-making practice is through the production of individual case-files, quarterly monitoring reports, and digital records that account for a project member’s work with clients at the different ‘stages’ that clients go through when interacting with the agency and project teams. As described to me by members of staff, these stages broadly include: registration, referral, action planning on the project, selecting for job interviews, job-starts, end of subsidized employment.

#### *4.2 Registering and referring clients*

Over the course of a day at the agency offices, clients or potential clients present themselves to the reception desk as they arrive for interviews, to ask whether staff are in the office, inquire about accessing support, describe their employment situation, explain what kinds of jobs they are looking for and talk about housing, childcare, transport, certification for construction or security roles, and so on. The Network’s offices are open to visitors for four

hours a day for registered clients to use computers for job-searching or training. On busy days, around thirty visitors use the services and computer facilities during morning and afternoon sessions. Before residents are able to take their initial requests further than the front desk, reception staff are required to check whether clients are either registered or eligible to register for support (on the 'intake' process in welfare agencies, see Zimmerman 1971). One of the first procedural stages that new clients encounter is the requirement to register with the Network.

When training new staff about how to work at the front desk, managers make clear that checking identity documents is a routine requirement. For clients, access to back-office employment advisors involves some form of presentation of identification documents and registering with the Network. Neither is this requirement to produce documents of little importance to staff and managers. The satisfaction of contractual obligations to deliver employment and training services is demonstrated through the presentation of accurate records that the Network is providing services to local residents. In these senses, documents are treated as evidence of the interactions and the underlying organisational arrangements between the commissioning local authority, the agency, its staff and clients. The act of documenting and being documented takes on additional importance after considering the preoccupation of staff and clients in producing documents that are used to change the employment status of clients. In the course of recording interventions that move a young person 'from NEET to EET', agency staff record information that is relevant to specific contractual obligations for delivery requirements. Network staff are required to produce records of actions in keeping with contractual commitments, health and safety regulations, budgetary expenditures, and so on.

One of the first questions that visitors are asked upon entering the offices is a routine inquiry about their status. The simplicity of the question – 'Are you registered?' – condenses

a set of issues into a polar question. Answering in the affirmative shifts the context into one in which access and support is an unproblematic entitlement. Answering in the negative shifts it towards one where further questions of eligibility are answerable by visitors. Either answer leads to a form of documentary practice, with registered clients asked to ‘sign in’ if they have already registered, and if they use a computer, reception staff will make a handwritten note of the number of the computer they use.

For new visitors, staff began a registration process which required that new clients present a valid passport containing visa status, a national insurance card or number, and proof that the prospective client lives within the local authority. The relationship between citizenship status and provision of social services is a familiar one. Gerard Noiriel (1996) has written about how the introduction of identity documents and the formalisation of ‘legal identity’ produced the possibility of enforcing ‘internal borders’ in accessing public services. When being inducted into how to work at reception, I was told that reception volunteers should check the citizenship status by seeing whether new clients with non-UK passports had a legal right to work, or an ‘indefinite leave to remain’, and thereby whether new clients were eligible to receive public services. There was no clear system of recording ‘clients turned away’ prior to registration. Once this initial registration was completed, clients were ‘referred’ to one of the project teams working in the back office. This was done by reception staff sending a ‘referral request’ using the Network Register. The set of requests was completed at the end of the working day by the receptionist, and involved completing the registration forms and writing short ‘bio’ statements for back office project staff to appraise the relevance of approving each client for their project. In this way, the receptionist was responsible for putting clients forward to back-office staff who would then check the Network Register to accept or reject requests, depending on whether they assessed the client to be appropriate for their project’s eligibility criteria (more on this in the two ‘scenarios’

presented later in this section). The duty manager would frequently remind staff to ‘check’ these requests. This duty manager and the monitoring officer would also log in to the Network Register to see ‘pending requests’ and remind staff to work through a backlog of requests.

Occasionally, staff would provide some informational sheet or ‘signposting’ to clients who could not be supported by the Network. This may be because they could not register with the Network as they did not reside in the local authority area, they had no right to access public services, or specifically requested services were not currently available at the Network, such as support filling in applications to claim a state pension. Behind the reception desk, staff had access to a file folder of information sheets which they referred to as ‘the bible’. This folder was turned to for information about other employment agencies, training providers, and other associated organisations. When prospective clients came in who could not be registered with the Network, staff might photocopy information sheets with lists of similar services in other local authorities, their addresses and contact details. This folder was used by staff at the reception area as the Network’s directory of welfare and employment services. This directory was treated as a resource which supplemented the knowledge of each member of staff, a guide for non-standard requests for information and advice, and a reproducible stock of information to be distributed on identifiable occasions about services inside and outside of the local authority.

As the Network was managed by referring newly registered clients to project teams based in the back-office, the criteria whereby clients were referred and how frequently staff checked the list of ‘referral requests’ were a topic of ongoing interest to management staff. In order to ensure that relevant support was given to new clients, the referral process was highlighted as being important in terms of both the technical procedures whereby client

records were sent to the appropriate project teams and by instructing staff to declare the relevant characteristics of clients at this initial registration stage.

The following field notes from one daily meeting provide an indication of how staff congregated to ensure a shared understanding about the procedure for assessing new clients and how to do referrals. Jennifer, the managing director of the agency running the Network, and Diane, ran through a training exercise for the assembled staff during a daily meeting in the back office.

Jennifer, the director, and Diane, the duty manager, lead today's team meeting. There is some confusion about which Julian that Diane is talking about as she described how we have been going through the reporting procedures on the Network Register. This is cleared up by saying that I am the 'other Julian'. Jennifer gives instructions about some matters having spent the day yesterday at reception. She says that clients are not allowed to go behind the desk at reception, even when it is busy. Don't leave phones out, don't put bags behind the desk, and be 'mindful' about asking sensitive questions if other clients are around. 'You can point at the screen,' is offered as a solution to asking clients these sensitive questions.

Jennifer explains how one client's online registration was made difficult by the inability to select more than one of the options for 'problems'. She was trying to check the following boxes: learning disabilities, dyslexia, mental health, health conditions, drug and substance issues, hearing impairment, sight impairment. 'She was saying that one, that one, that one,' but they could only select one. 'So we had to choose the worst one,' Jennifer said. Diane then said that it is a 'historical' issue and she will change that. I wonder what this means for client declarations completed prior to this issue being raised. What to make of the summary statistics about the client cohort that Diane just printed out for me? Are they going to be skewed in cases where more than one option applied? Considering these concerns about troubles recording 'problems', what does this mean about the different way that 'technical' problem and other 'problems' are treated?

Jennifer and Diane go on to present some 'scenarios' for staff to discuss. It seems that each scenario is being used to check whether staff members' are attuned with the referral process. That is to say, where clients should be referred in the Network and to which team. This required fitting clients into the client criteria for each project. The first scenario was described as follows:

'She had been on Incapacity Benefit or ESA for twenty years, she hasn't worked in all that time obviously. She's just been put on a Jobseeker's Allowance, so she was, kind of a bit terrified at the idea that she had to get a job. She disclosed to Agnes and I that she had stopped using drugs and had been clean for two and a half months. She also disclosed that she still has a problem with alcohol, that she has a criminal record. But she had a letter from the police with her, that she gave me,

something to do with a crime that she's committed very recently, presumably connected to some of the drug and alcohol problems, I'm not sure. So she had a huge amount of problems apart from the fact that she was shaking, almost, with fear, um... So, so, she really needed a lot of support, it would be difficult, you know, we asked did she want to get some help with her alcohol problems, she said yes. I said to her to, she could wait for ten or fifteen minutes she could see Camille. She disappeared. She didn't have a telephone number, she didn't have a national insurance number with her, she said she couldn't switch on a computer, she had no idea about how to use a computer. So, she's kind of, gone now, so I'll need to probably get back to the Jobcentre and see if we can get her back again somehow, we don't have a way of contacting her.'

Diana then described the second scenario as follows:

One-to-one support, looking for work, [provided] a really good CV, previous employment, a degree in IT, CV on the Network Register, looks like adapting it to more, or make it two pages instead of three... Where would people send this person?

The criteria list provided to staff working at reception does not make sense outside of the way that each case was interpreted by staff as belonging to a Network project. In this sense, ensuring how referrals were done involved ensuring staff understood what services were available in the Network and what the appropriate support that could be provided. The issues that each new client presented was to be worked out in terms of what services were available and appropriate, rather than giving an abstract description of what should be done in each case. They made sense of a client in relation to the portfolio of projects that were available and whether there was some way to interpret a clients' identity as matching these projects.

Staff then made a few guesses about what to do in the scenarios. For the first one they seem to focus on who, outside of the network, can support the client with drug and alcohol treatment. There was someone else working at the offices who seemed relevant, although staff cannot refer clients to him as he only receives referrals from the police. He was not

working that day and so could not be asked to advise on next steps. For the second scenario, Jennifer initially asked: ‘how long unemployed?’ Diane said, five months. One member of staff claimed that the client is for the ‘employable’ project team. One member of that team says that ‘even a year’s alright as long as he’s bright’.

Donileen Loseke (2000: 147-171) has written about the way that ‘social problems workers’, such as employment advisors and other staff in the ‘troubled-persons industry’, deal with ‘specialised’ roles and ‘fragmentation’ of services. This leads to workers having to define a clients’ problems in ways that match up with a patchwork of programs. When programs are ‘narrowly defined’ in terms of eligibility criteria, workers have the power to enforce a classification of clients so as to change a particular aspect of a client’s actions, behaviour, or attitudes. In these examples, we have found another feature of intervention work. Staff need to be able to demonstrate their understanding of the specific set of available resources, in terms of services and staff, in the Network that can be reasonably claimed to be suitable for clients. For management, it is important to ensure that the procedures that staff use to ‘make referrals’ is relatively standardised so that the assessments are undertaken by staff in similar ways. Although these cases are not of NEETs, they indicate one way that staff are instructed to document and classify newly registered clients, and how staff are required to have a knowledge of how different groups of clients should be organised within the Jobs Network. Although staff are responsible for delivering their projects, they are also expected to be knowledgeable about the availability of other services within and outside of the Network. They are also expected to work a couple of shifts per week on the reception, and therefore to register new clients and refer them to specialised projects within the Network. The next section of this chapter will go on to discuss how ‘hard to engage’ clients are described by staff in project documents.

#### 4.3 *Monitoring Reports and the category of 'drop outs'*

It is no surprise that intervention work requires the ongoing exchange and circulation of reports about delivery outcomes. In the case of the NEET wage-subsidy project, these reports detail the new intake of registered clients by the project team, discussed concerns arising with currently employed participants, and addressed troubles and issues between agency staff and commissioning agents at the local authority monitoring the delivery of the contract. These reports and staff members' talk were used to organise how sense was made of ““problems” in employment services’ (Müller and Wolff 2015). The chapter has offered some initial indications about the ways that members of staff put together routines to process client registrations at the Network. For the wage-subsidy project team, another set of documentary procedures were used to evidence their work to the commissioning agent. These documentary procedures accounted for both desirable and undesirable outcomes.

Whilst social policy debates have centred on increasing ‘conditionality’ in the provision of state welfare, whereby benefit payments are dependent upon undertaking mandatory job-search activities, participants on the wage-subsidy project team were not subject to such methods of ensuring compliance with contractual outcomes (see details about the ESRC ‘Welfare Conditionality’ research project, Watts *et al* 2014). Management information collected by the project team indicated that the project cohort had ongoing contact with Jobcentre Plus clients. By October 2015, 48%, (58/118) participants on the wage subsidy project, had declared that were in receipt of out-of-work benefits (Disability Living Allowance, ESA, Income Support, JSA, or ‘JSA (has a health issue)’). Although the project team were in contact with Jobcentre Plus staff in the borough, there seemed to be a low number of young people referred to the project by Jobcentre staff (n. 4, ~3%). A majority of the participants were recorded as being aged between 18 and 25 (n. 87, 73.73%), male (n. 69,



58.47%), and British or European Passport holders (n. 72, 61.02%), with the remainder having Indefinite Leave to Remain (n. 1), refugee status (n. 1), or Right to Work in the UK (n. 62, 52.54%).

When staff explained the purpose of the wage-subsidy project to new clients and employers, they formulated in terms of supporting young people and small businesses within the area, rather than in reference to a national policy agenda of ‘making work pay’. For the client-side of the project, staff needed to find ways to characterise their work in terms that made sense to clients. This was done by linking together a set of elements: young people, a one-year full time contract, London Living Wage, small and medium-sized enterprises within the borough, and the local authority. In articulating the project’s terms of reference to prospective participants, staff gave an overarching sense of what and who was involved. These initial characterisations required defining the project in ways that produced a context in which to understand what actions clients should adhere to. These summaries provided, what Gale Miller has called, ‘organizationally preferred understandings and expectations about the program’ (1991: 104).

As a routine feature of describing the project, staff members invoked a context in which to make sense of their activities. One example of this is found in a telephone exchange between a project member, Susan, and a prospective client. My field notes recorded one side of this conversation.

You could register with [project name], that’s my project. We source jobs with [borough] employers for sustainable employment.

She then asked if the caller lived in the borough, who had advised them to call, who are they under the care of, whether they are in contact with social services. ‘Say you want to register

under the [name] project and we take it from there...' In response to the caller's reply: 'It depends on what kind of work you're looking for.' Then, whilst laughing 'Yeah, that's what they all say.' Laughing again: 'Everything!' She then lists what jobs will be coming up in the New Year: landscape gardener, building apprentice, IT/business administrator. 'Those are not courses, they're jobs my love.' (During the week prior to this exchange, I had been trying to arrange a time to come to the office to get an update about the project. The project member had emailed to tell me that they are mostly in 'monitoring mode' this month. Susan explained by email: 'I need to catch up on the reporting'.)

As we sat in the office on this day of observation, Susan was on the phone. After speaking to this prospective client, she continued to talk me through how she was writing the report. On the computer in front of us was a copy of a draft monitoring report. I was curious about the purpose of the report as it seemed that project staff were already in regular contact with council staff. Susan had previously indicated that the project team will speak to partners at the council, either on the phone or in person, about three or four times a week, and will be in constant email contact. The monitoring report was treated as a different kind of document about their work. The report did not address matters of immediate concern, whether that be the requirement to check that a subsidy payment has gone to an employer who had hired a client or to check with the commissioning local authority's legal team about making amendments to employment contracts. The report was a retrospective summary of the last three months' work.

In an interview with the project manager at the local authority, the manager indicated that the report's narrative section was recently added because numbers and statistics only tell part of the story. On another day, Susan told me that the narrative part of the report has a few categories that the project team are instructed to 'fill in'. These concern both the experience of employers and clients, written by staff responsible for each side of delivering the project.

She told me that she started off the document in a positive manner, writing what had happened and what had gone well. The report then moved on to what has not been working and what challenges they have faced. Lastly, facing forwards, how they are going to address these challenges. This narrative strategy will be used for each section of the report.

Whilst Susan was away from the computer I continued to read the draft quarterly report in the reception area that was closed to the public. The monitoring officer at the Network was walking around speaking to different staff members to remind them about what to report for their contribution to the quarterly monitoring exercise. She walked over to speak to the receptionist to ask about what has been going on at the front desk this quarter. 'We're writing a report on the service,' she told the receptionist. She asks how many volunteers have worked there since November, if they've participated in any training, what is being done to help them find employment. 'Some of this stuff only you know,' she told the receptionist. She asked about the volunteers' demographic information, 'the council like that kind of stuff.' She asked what else has happened during the quarter: have there been any sessions on apprenticeships, job fairs, any client forums? The receptionist told her that there haven't been any forums yet, but they are putting one together in the next week and each project team will nominate a client to attend.

The agency does not benefit from excluding these facts from monitoring reports. The more details that can be put into the report, the more evidence that the agency can use to demonstrate that work is being done and that contractual obligations are being met and exceeded. Given that writing monitoring report constitutes a feature of making intervention work visible, how do these reports account for the activities that being are reported upon? What do staff write about when they write about employment interventions? What counts as an adequate, factual, and evidenced descriptions of three months of implementing a project?

Do these reports constitute an accurate or an inaccurate picture of what has taken place through the staff's work? Is that distinction valid?

As I continued to read the draft report, the monitoring officer approached Susan. Susan told the monitoring officer that another member of the project team has made an error when updating a client's record on the Network Register. He had entered a 'Participant Action Plan' but did not click the other entries off. A consequence of this was that every possible entry about the client has been added to their record. So 'Job Start', 'Job Sustainment for 12 weeks', 'Job Sustainment for 26 weeks', 'Job Sustainment for 52 weeks', appeared on the system after one erroneous click. The monitoring officer tells her that someone has to go into each entry and delete every one. For staff, checking over the production of records on the Network Register involved an ongoing monitoring of new entries entered onto the network database. This required attending to incongruities that are recognisable to experienced members of staff. As Max Travers (2007: 131-135) has indicated in the work of doing 'quality assurance', undertaking monitoring work requires competence in observing the coherent adherence to practical procedures for accomplishing professional, project-based work. When this coherence is not found, such as in the case of simultaneous entries of job starts and sustainment of the job at 12, 26, and 52 weeks, corrections and alterations are sought.

The ongoing monitoring of project team member's work, and the wage-subsidy project itself, therein required the routine observation of digitally archived client records, the amendment of these records to exhibit 'what has really happened with these clients'. This involves continuously clarifying who a client is, what has been done with them, and how the project accounts for their current status.

In the draft monitoring report, staff members' activities were accounted for as a narrative description of three months' work. Susan and I carried on finessing the report, I

made suggestions about rephrasing sentences and typographic errors, and asked for clarification about which clients had been alluded to without being named. At the end of my visit that day, a section of the draft narrative report read as follows (spelling mistakes have not been amended).

### **‘Quarterly Narrative Report [...]’**

#### **Overall Impact over this quarter**

##### **Job roles -Q3**

Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter started we have had a new member of staff join the team and have built up some excellent momentum. Team [...] are working cohesively and have built good links with a number of organizations having undergone a major outreach initiative. We have built solid relationships with these organization who are now referring clients over to the [...] project. The team have worked hard in setting up a more defined way of screening candidates which has seen a marked increase in placing candidates into work. In addition, we have

Q3 there has been a number challenges as many of the available job roles have seemed unattractive to our young [...] candidates. We changed the title of some of the roles in order to generate interest and this approach has had some success. Having said that, there still some challenges being faced when trying to place young people in hospitality roles. Whilst reviewing our live vacancies to most popular and easy to fill roles have been administrative roles.

##### **Gaining a work ethic**

Part of the reason why young people drop out is they don’t understand the concept of having to get to work on time, doing what they are instructed to do and respecting their peers. Some believe that if they wake up late it is easier to say they are unable to work that day due to illness rather than telling the truth and turning up. We are working hard with all our clients for them to understand the importance of having a work ethic as well as taking ownership of their actions!

##### **Drop outs and challenges they faced??**

There have only been 2 young people who have dropped out this quarter. One of the issues known to the team was the conduct of the employer. In this case, the employer did not pay the young person on time and requested she do additional duties outside of her contracted hours.

The other was a combination of the Employer not providing in-house support and the young person not understanding his duties. Although team [...] were in touch with the client, none of the issues were brought to our attention. Further talks to the Employer and Client were undertaken but these talks failed and both the client and employer decided to part company.

Knowing what happened made us more aware that in order to ensure our Yp [Young people] stay in employment we would become far more involved with the management and support of our clients. This entails making contact with both Employer and Employee on a monthly basis to ascertain any problems which have or may occur and dealing with it promptly.

This incomplete account, not yet signed-off by the rest of the project team, the monitoring officer or the company director, before being sent to the council officers, was at a fragile stage. The narrative had not been fully worked out, the points of reference were provisional, and there was another section on the ‘employer side’ and missing details to be filled in by other project members.

One initial point to note is how the topic of ‘work ethic’ is made relevant to the staff’s work. In this way the topic not solely treated as a sociological category. ‘Work ethic’, ‘roles’ and ‘drop out’ form part of a sociological lexicon but are made relevant here to how staff were required to narrate their work product. This provides scope with which to counter some of Andrew Dunn’s (2010, 2013, 2015) claims about the attitude of ‘activation workers’ towards jobseekers. Dunn, as mentioned in the literature review, draws upon surveys and interviews with activation workers to propose how unemployed clients in employment service agencies view paid employment. These assessments, he claims, offer insights directly from the experience of front-line professionals who have an intimate insight into jobseekers’ attitudes towards employment. This Monitoring Report reviewed here offers a different sense of how ‘work ethic’ is made relevant as an organisational matter. For staff, to complete the requirement to report about jobseekers ‘work ethic’ is associated with the obligation to deliver on contractual agreements. It was a pre-formulated category for their reporting

procedures, included by local authority officers checking up on the implementation of the program. The draft Monitoring Report did not need to cite Max Weber to substantiate how members of staff were defining ‘work ethic’ and did not need to specify whether the ‘work ethic’ that they were describing was Protestant, capitalist, or some other form. Instead, the ‘work ethic’ was an attribute that staff were expected to observe and report on about clients, thereby conveying whether they were successfully delivering on the contract.

In summarising the features of the project that were relevant to the report, this incomplete text displayed a provisional version that had yet to fully account for the project team’s work. The incomplete account only made sense in relation to contractual requirements with the commissioner, what had happened during project delivery that bore upon reportable outcomes, the regular interaction of staff working on the project and council staff, and methods for making sense of how to interpret statements about ‘conduct’. It was, in Rod Watson’s (2009) terms, a ‘text-in-use’, used by staff to justify that they were fulfilling contractual obligations. This was not a document that contained revelations for readers. As no new information was disclosed, it displayed a reflexive account of shared interpretations of significant events and describable practices for readers already aware of day-to-day activities.

For all intents and purposes, what needed to be worked up into a completed version was already sketched out in reference to recorded actions, events, interventions, conversations and interactions which traced what had taken place in the previous three months. The report reiterated the work to achieve contractual agreements between the council, the agency and the project team. Although the narrative report was ostensibly qualitative, it still made use of references to relative numerical quantities: ‘a number of’, ‘some’, ‘many’, ‘part’, ‘further’, ‘none’, ‘additional’, ‘amount’, ‘any’. In mitigating against generalisations, the report used such unspecified quantities to indicate whether the team had delivered the contracted outcomes. These outcomes gave a general orientation towards

defining what current practices required change. It offered a set of stock phrases to describe the project. This account depicted a stance towards the current approach taken by the project team and how it would be altered. This was expressed through declarations of recognition: the next quarter would be different after they had introduced a new system, they had recognised the need for new practices after becoming more aware. The very writing of the document gave evidence to changes that could be expected.

Researchers treating administrative documents as data, available for the application of theoretical frameworks to analyse the themes, discursive and narrative tropes, may pause to reflect on why an incomplete narrative report is described in this chapter. Why treat an incomplete version of a text as an object for analysis? Why highlight the form and content of this text when these details may be written out of the final version as it is passed on to other project members, monitoring officers, the company director and council staff? Although the incomplete status of the text makes it unsuited for dissemination as an authorised account, it provides an example of the transitional steps take to work up descriptions about how the project's implementation are implicated within the routine practice of undertaking such work. The work of describing the project's implementation is not the work that the report seeks to describe, but the writing of such reports is a routine feature of accounting for intervention work.

Two cases of 'drop out' cases are mentioned in the third section of the incomplete draft report. The report does not clarify many of the details related to these cases. Nor does the report identify an individual author. Instead, the document presents a plural first-person, an institutional 'we', to describe how members of the project team worked on the issue of 'drop outs'. The document details that efforts were made to try to rectify the situation between client and employer, and that these talks were not able to prevent the client 'dropping out'. To show how staff members account for staff members' efforts to address the



clients described as dropping out in draft narrative, I quote from a team meeting where the first ‘drop out’ case was presented. I then review the interactional practices through which the news of the second ‘drop out’ was announced in another meeting. The first case was described in a team meeting by one staff member to two others and myself, with Michael as the employee and Melanie as the employer.

What happened was, and I’ve been trying- we’ve been trying to liaise with Michael. Um what has transpired is, Michael failed to turn up to work from, I don’t know, late September, and Melanie- the only reason why I knew was because Melanie emailed me... to tell me that she is not going to put up with it anymore and that, um she will give him notice, which is, what prompted me to try to get... hold of him, I eventually got hold of Michael and he tells me, there’s two sides of the coin... Michael’s versions of events is that she is very unapproachable, I’ve never met the lady so... He can’t speak to her, um it’s very difficult to work with her, um... um, but she’s a nice person, um she hasn’t paid him and, he doesn’t feel as though he want to go back. That’s Michael. Melanie’s version is completely different

One initial feature to notice is that in describing this ‘drop out’, the staff member invokes ‘two sides of the coin’ as an idiomatically phrased, common-sense notion with which to interpret what happened. This notion displays an orientation towards the event that requires an inquiry that is associated with fairness and balance. This notion is modified by indicating that Michael and Melanie’s explanations of events are ‘versions’. In this sense, each party has a ‘version’, and the staff member, in relaying what these versions are, also demonstrates how she came to inquire into these ‘completely different’ versions. These efforts are noted as attempts to find out about the situation, by ‘trying to liaise’, ‘Melanie emailed me’, and ‘prompted me to try to get... hold of him’. From these descriptions it is not clear that either ‘side of the coin’ had presented a definitive version with which to interpret the ‘drop out’.

The ‘second case known to us’ bears recognisable features to a client that will be referred to as Caleb. In order to explicate how staff received and responded to a report of

‘dropping out’, an extract from a team meeting will be presented. The extract gives a sense of how the announcement and reception of news organised what sense was to be made for the staff’s work. As news has the potential to disorientate actors by unsettling assumptions about the course of ordinary affairs, the way that news reports relate to remedial actions has received detailed analysis. The interactional and conversational features of ‘news delivery sequences’ has been systematically analysed in terms of the recurrent features of: preannouncement or inquiry, announcement of news, announcement response, elaboration of news, and assessment of news (Maynard 2003: 88-119). As Maynard writes, the delivery of news is an interactional accomplishment attuned to producing recognisable ‘news delivery sequences’. As L interrupts the meeting, she moves to preannounce that she has some news for the group. She says, ‘About to crash on you with hard... bad news for you all’. Rather than tell the group what this news is, this move tentatively indicates that *news is coming*. The subsequently relatively dramatic features of the following extract also show how the project staff then move to account for the circumstances of how this ‘drop out’ requires attention.

By presenting this data the chapter does not seek to point to obfuscation in the incomplete narrative report, but suggest two practices. Firstly, staff are called upon to generate an immediately available, shared stance to clients ‘dropping out’ of placements by devising responses to this news. Secondly, staff members themselves formulate how to initiate inquiries into the reasons for the news and draw from their shared knowledge and interpretive resources to exhibit what sense to make of this ‘drop out’.

### **Transcript A**

- S: Yeah, sadly, in Michael’s case, he- he felt  
[door opens, Leanne appears and stands in the doorway of the meeting room]  
L: Hi, um=  
S: Good afternoon! (*laughing*)  
L: About to crash on you with hard

C: Pardon  
 L: Bad news for you all  
 W: What?  
 C: Wh[at?  
 S: [What?  
 L: Caleb's left  
 W: Well we were just talking about [him  
 S: [We was just talking=  
 L: =I don't know if they told him to go or if he just walked  
 S: Look what I've got here  
 [long silence, sighs and tutting]  
 S: How did you get the news?  
 L: Max, I don't know if she's phoned for you originally=  
 S: =Yeah  
 W: Uh  
 L: But then she rung my mobile  
 W: She might have done, we ( )  
 C: She hasn't spoken to him, has she? What [did he say?  
 L: [Yeah  
 L: He just felt like he wasn't progressing  
 C: Right  
 L: Um, I think money again, again  
 C: Uhh  
 L: =He needed the money, so um

The news is delivered in a blunt form, 'Caleb's left', with S and W indicating that he was already being discussed by staff. L clarifies the extent of her knowledge of this occurrence: 'I don't know if they told him to go or if he just walked.' L goes on to account for the reason why she came to receive the call. This seems to acknowledge that L is no longer a member of the project team, and so therefore should not be the first person to receive the news from the caller, 'Max', who is Caleb's advisor at another agency. C asks for further details about the news, 'She hasn't spoken to him, has she? What did he say?' L then gives potential reasons as to why this has happened: 'He just felt like he wasn't progressing', 'I think money again. Again', and 'He needed the money.' The repetition of 'again' suggests prior knowledge amongst the project team that there is an issue related to money. What this issue is remains underspecified in this exchange. This lack of detail is not problematic in generating a context

for interpreting the news, instead it is a resource to refer to as an already acknowledged reason as to why this has occurred.

In the narrative report this was characterised as ‘the employer did not pay the young person on time’. However, in the narrative report there is no need to account for how Max told them on this time at this time in those words, how this news was delivered by Leanne who was no longer on the project team. The practical orientation of staff towards this news means that the event can be accounted for without attending to such details. After a few turns, the exchange about Caleb is resumed.

### **Transcript B**

- C: Go on  
L: Um, so yeah, I'd- I'd call Max, she'll probably give you  
W: Mmhmm  
L: A lot more info but because she was dealing with somebody else as well, while she was asking [about them  
C: [Well I kind- we kind of knew it was coming  
L: Yeah, exactly  
W: Yeah, (right)  
C: Just (needed to) know when  
L: Well I'm [sorry that I crashed] uh, your meeting=  
W: [(I'm so ( )  
C: =It's alright, onwards and upwards (*laughing*)  
L: Could crash- wish I could crash with [better news  
[Leanne leaves the meeting room]  
S: So we need to- we need to ring Caleb then, thanks Leanne  
C: Thank you darling

L advises the team to make further inquiries and that the news is not a complete report. C orientates towards what the project team already knew, with a repair of an ‘I’ to a ‘we’: ‘Well I kind- we kind of knew it was coming.’ C specifies that they were knowingly aware that it might happen, with uncertainty about its timing, not its occurrence. S resolves what to do next, ‘we need to ring Caleb then’, shifting away from the third party, ‘Max’, towards speaking directly to the client.

In moving on with the project, the stance that the project team take is not to receive the news as an ‘end point’, but a report that requires remedial action so that the client and the employer is contacted, whilst acknowledging that there was some inevitability about ‘dropping out’. In finding resolution to emergent situations in delivering the wage-subsidy project, we can note another feature of intervention work, which is how to receive and deal with news that is treated as consequential, and formulate an account of its consequence, cause, reason, and next steps to take in light of this event. Whilst staff have been aware of this ‘situation’ with Caleb, their response to the news has drawn upon a shared knowledge of how to interpret this news, what it might mean for the client’s status on the project, and what to do next.

#### *4.3 Documenting troubles and intervention tales*

The previous section has described how staff made sense of a client who had ‘dropped out’, and how this was made both visible and reportable. Upon receipt of this news, staff made sense of this occurrence by enacting, what Maynard has called, a ‘news delivery sequence’ (2003). The sequence displays how a client’s activity, status, relationships, and so on, are a topic of ongoing concern for implementing the project. The sequence also indicates how staff members’ roles and responsibilities on the project are articulated in the course of making sense of the consequence of the news for ensuring that staff have delivered upon contracted outcomes.

This episode also provides scope to make a distinction between accounts about ‘drop outs’ on monitoring reports and workplace commentary upon hearing news about an individual client. The monitoring report details the event as accountable to the commissioning agent by grouping a set of cases together with a remedial plan for future

cases. When staff received news of this client during a team meeting, it was not orientated to as one example in a set of cases but in terms of a set of relationships that needed to be addressed: between the client and employer, the project team and the client, the project team and the employer, the project team and the news deliverer, amongst project team members, the news deliverer and the caller, the caller and the client, the caller and the project team. Although staff indicated that the news required further investigation as it remained uncertain as to whether ‘they told him to go or if he just walked’, they were able to draw upon prior knowledge, forewarnings about its possible occurrence, interactional skills and resources with which to make sense of its practical consequences as news for the project.

This prior knowledge cannot be comprehensively itemised from the records found on the network database or paper records. As staff met with, spoke to, emailed, texted, and stayed in contact with clients and employers on an ongoing basis, one way to understand the practical implications of the project team’s knowledge about clients was through a practice that staff offhandedly referred to as ‘putting them in the mix’. This involved the selection of candidates to be put forward for sourced, live vacancies. Part of this selection work involved suggesting potential clients to other project staff. They may say, ‘I’m thinking of putting (name) forward for the role at (employer)’, or ‘I want to put (name) in the mix. I think they would be a good match.’ The following extract from a team meeting shows how this work is done by staff members as they orientate to ‘two new people’. The first speaker does this by eliciting consent for prospective action without mentioning the characteristics of the candidates or making qualifying assessment about their suitability.

### **Transcript C**

S1: Uh, so, anyway, so we’ve got two new people

S2: Okay

S1: Uh, to put forward, and I remember you saying yesterday so we can just fire those

straight across  
 S2: Yeah, fire them (straight)=  
 S1: =as they come in  
 S3: What two new people?  
 S1: So there was one person that you said about for the online, and that was, what's his name?  
 S3: Arnold ((surname))?  
 S1: No, the one with the really, jazzy  
 S3: Oh, Ezekiel [((surname))]  
 S1: [Yeah  
 S2: Oh I recognise that name  
 S3: Yeah, yeah he was, he- he was with us at the beginning of the project, young guy, really kind of um, uhh, creative, um, and he did go for a position but there was some confusion with regards to, him turning up or he couldn't get in  
 S2: Oh okay  
 S3: There was some issue

Initially, agreement is reached that 'two new people' can be put in the mix without an elaborated discussion of the client. The agreement is made relevant to a sequentially ordered, future occasion, 'as they come in'. With these steps, the project team negotiate what actions are to be taken with clients being put forward. These steps also cite a prior agreement between staff members about 'firing across' applications to an employer. Whilst agreement seems to have been reached by S1 and S2, S3 queries the identity of the 'two new people', and, once their name has been acknowledged by staff in three 'oh' prefaced turns (Heritage 1998). As Schegloff writes, 'oh' prefaced turns can be used to 'register a just-preceding utterance... as an "informing"' (2007: 118). S3 then begins to initiate an account about the one of the clients in terms of their prior involvement on the project. This account could be treated as signalling that there may be reasons as to why there may be difficulties working with this client. As an initial example, this extract gives a sense of the way that a client's involvement on the project is displayed in terms of, what we will describe later in the chapter as, *intervention tales*. These tales account for clients in terms of their relation to project aims, outcomes, records of previous interactions, impressions of their personality and behaviour, and their background and interests in specific types of vacancies. Before we move on to

describe these tales in more detail, it is necessary to explain how staff used documents in order to visualise the client cohort in administrative documents. This part of the chapter further explains how documents were used in order to coordinate their shared orientation to the client cohort.

Prior to clients being put forward for vacancies, staff contact them to check whether they would be interested in applying. In the previous extract, staff displayed how clients are required to send through a CV, sometimes with a covering letter, which was then to be sent on to employers who selected which, if any, of the clients to invite to interview. In reviewing which clients to put forward for vacancies, staff had a set of documentary sources from which to make visible who would be appropriate for vacancies. Rather than assume that these sources transparently indicated which clients would be appropriate for roles, this selection work involved using these sources to identify details that were treated as relevant for accomplishing this activity. These sources are working documents that are collaboratively produced by the project team.

One of the project documents used to depict the client caseload was a spreadsheet that staff referred to as the ‘RAG Report’, the acronym standing for Red-Amber-Green. It provided a loosely defined coding procedure that segmented the cohort into categories that were of practical concern for implementation. The Report depicted the cohort by representing the stance that staff would take towards a client’s ongoing participation in the project. The Report was open to project staff adding to and amending the color-coding of clients as required. The Report provided a color-coded overview of the cohort, available to staff as an ‘orientated object’. As Garfinkel states, ‘talk of orientated objects is a way of insisting on the importance of the appearance of things’ (2002: 180; 179-181). As an ‘orientated object’ that visualised the project cohort, the report provided a loosely defined coding procedure to sort





the cohort into categories that were of practical concern for implementation. Staff used this spreadsheet to compile details about clients who had registered with the agency and were referred to the project. By October 2015, around six months after the project started, there were over one hundred and seventy clients represented on the spreadsheet. Staff filled out details by selecting information from the Job Network's client registration forms, forms completed during action plan meetings, and subsequent contact with clients. The Report depicted the total cohort in segments corresponding to the stance taken towards their participation in the project; it also depicted the ongoing course of enrolling clients as cohort members and was open to project staff adding to, amending, and recoding clients as required.

Firstly, staff sometimes referred clients to other agencies once they had been coded 'Red'. To do this, staff members reviewed client declaration forms as well as the Report, made a list of clients who had been, or needed to be, coded 'Red'. Once staff had identified clients with the 'most complex challenges', they referred them to an organisation that was deemed to offer more suitable, specialised support. On one occasion, staff had been instructed by management to refer clients to another agency who would benefit from their services. Staff explained that this was partly due to the vacancies being with small and medium sized enterprises who often did not have necessary support in place, and that these employers found it difficult to understand the particular challenges of clients with 'complex needs' and 'challenging backgrounds'. Staff explained that some of these clients had learning disabilities, although it did not seem that staff had received specific training or diagnostic tools to make such assessments. Staff thereby grouped together clients who had identified themselves during initial registration as having learning disabilities with clients who staff suspected had undiagnosed learning disabilities, and send their details through to another organisation. The assumption was that by referring clients to this organisation they would

Job Preference	Status/ Comments	Referred by	Action Plan	Development	Other
Bike mechanic	B Red		Yes	No longer wishing to participate	
Childcare/ animals	B Red	WOM - Family	Yes	(training program)? Hard to engage	
admin/ airport	B Red	Troubled Families	Yes	could do with more careers advice, work experience	
Retail/ customer service	B Red	(youth charity)	Yes	Taken on Development programme	
retail/ fashion	B Red	Troubled Families	Yes	Referred to Prince's Trust	
Retail/hospitality	B Red	WOM	Yes	Referred client to Inspire	
IT/plumbing/	B Red	Facebook	Yes	Applied for (borough) Apprenticeships	
not sure	B Red	Troubled Families	Yes	Hard to engage - not attending appointments	
not known	B Red	Troubled Families	Yes	Troubled Family - hard to engage	
Animal care	B Red	WOM	Yes	Young Mum - hard to engage not willing to leave child	
Not yet known	Z Working	Not (wage subsidy project)	No	to be contacted for Action planning	Cleint now employeed as a scaffolder

*Figure 4.2:* Extract from RAG Report. Extract from the NEET wage subsidy team's 'RAG Report'. The excel spreadsheet is used to collect information about over one hundred and forty registered clients. All identifying details about clients and local service organisations have been anonymised by replacing text within parentheses. The 'client name' column has been removed. 'Troubled Families' refers to a government program. 'WOM' is an initialism for 'word of mouth'. The spelling and layout of the rest of the spreadsheet have not been modified.

receive specialist support in job-preparedness training, job-search activities, and on-the-job support.

A second example concerns clients marked as ‘hard to engage’ on the Report. This category was used to describe clients that staff found it difficult to enrol in project activities. In one sense, this category offered a loose designation about clients who did not exhibit adequate reciprocity during interactions with the project team. Some version of this designation was used in relation to twenty-eight of the ‘Red’ clients on the Report. Of these, fourteen ‘Red’ entries detail that the client is ‘hard to engage’. Four of the fourteen entries took the form of: ‘*Hard to engage – not attending appointments.*’ Three of these comments were verbatim, a fourth to similar effect, ‘*Not turning up for appointments, hard to engage*’. Other entries signalled that a client’s status had been or would be effectively cooled, or that they had, or should be, enrolled on other programs. The following illustrative examples are taken from the RAG report.

Comments about ‘hard to engage’ clients were not exclusively applied to clients coded ‘Red’. Over forty other clients had comments that clients: were either ‘not participating’, ‘not engaging’, ‘failed to attend appointments’, ‘no phone number on record’, ‘phone messages had not been returned’, or ‘unable to get in contact’. Only in a small number of entries were dates included in the comments section and only in reference to referrals made to other agencies. As this category applied to candidates irrespective of their employability, how did staff use the designation of ‘hard to engage’ to organise the selection of clients for vacancies? The following extracts from a meeting between with two members of the project team provides additional materials to answer this question. The extracts show that it is not possible to adequately understand the descriptor ‘hard to engage’ in terms of an etymological definition nor in reference to administrative documents used by the project team. Instead, as a designation, it constituted an interpretive resource through which to index

the project-relevant characteristics of a client. As Spencer (2001: 159) has detailed about professionals in human service agencies, the self- definition of clients' identities is dependent upon the way that an 'institutional discourse provides the conditions of possibility for constructing persons and their troubles'.

In order to make sense of how this descriptor was used during reviewing clients for vacancies, staff also cited details from both documentary sources and memories of prior encounters. These recollections were not systematically recorded on documentary forms or the Network Register, but were displayed by the project team as *intervention tales* about a series of interactions between staff and clients. The following extracts are from a meeting with project staff where they were looking to find suitable candidates for a number of current vacancies and also to familiarise themselves with the current client cohort in the course of reviewing a folder of client registration documents. The extracts provide examples with which to describe the methods whereby staff reasoned about clients who had not secured employment through the project. Rather than claim that 'hard to engage' clients caused the most difficulty for staff, the extracts show how this descriptor only makes sense in terms of the practical exigency of implementing project-related tasks.

In the following two extracts, this also involved producing person descriptions as *intervention tales*. These are sequentially organised descriptions of previous encounters between staff and the client under discussion. These person descriptions were designed for the task at hand (Lerner and Kitzinger 2007; Schegloff 1996). These person descriptions were bound to staff members formulate of, what Donileen Loseke has called 'organizational narratives' (2007: 670-672). The design and sequential organisation of personal descriptions, as Doug Maynard (1984) has shown, provides a practical resource for organising how lawyers engage in institutional negotiations such as plea bargaining. For the wage-subsidy staff, these persons description are used to detail prior encounters to display how clients have

conducted themselves during interactions with staff. The descriptions display how staff had instructed clients, how these instructions had been acted upon, what moral assessments to make of these staff-client interactions, and how other actors are drawn in to the employment intervention. In searching for clients to put forward for vacancies, this next extract shows staff members' orientating to a quick succession of clients who are not selected as candidates. For these cases, the two members of staff skimmed through a set of negative cases that result from a set of disparate descriptions.

On the table in front of the two staff members and myself was a large folder in which staff collected all the forms used on the project. The bulk of the folder contained completed client declarations forms, action plans, a copy of the RAG Report, and other project documents. As staff talked, they flicked and scanned through client forms, placing them on piles corresponding to the vacancies and possible referrals to other organisations. The new project manager worked through the alphabetically ordered folder of client documents, pulling out forms, inspecting additional, handwritten notes. One of the staff explained how members of the project team used different 'systems' for coding the forms, saying that the project manager

has her system. When I put the forms on [Network Register], I put highlighters through. Otherwise I'll put them on three times and it just goes through my mind. So I always put a highlighter through.

This different 'system' also distinguished which members of the project team had registered, action planned, and updated the clients' database record. There were a number of distinguishing marks, i.e. handwritten notes, annotations, post-it notes, and recommendations written in the margins and the verso side of the form. Such addenda compensated for, what Moore *et al* (2011: 185-186) refer to as, the 'chronic insufficiency of standard forms'. Once

these forms had been scanned and entered onto the network database, any additional handwritten notes added to forms could be said to be ‘off the system’.

Staff treated the coding of each client through a binary rationale. For the task at hand, clients were either available or unavailable for candidate status. In none of the cases were there ‘maybes’. Where there was uncertainty over a clients’ candidate status, staff displayed how, rather than offering a judgement in the form of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ utterances, they collaboratively produced descriptions of clients so as to resolve what to do with this client. Their talk displayed a shared orientation to the clients as members of a cohort who were accountable to expectations of conduct, current employment status, and as indicating a preference for types of employment. The staff’s work involved treating clients as unavailable through a set of related glosses: ‘is working’, ‘has a job’, ‘got a job’, ‘unavailable’, ‘disengaged’, ‘off the radar’, ‘is out’, ‘is going to college’, ‘part of ((another program))’, ‘very hard to engage’, ‘does not engage’, ‘he’s done’, ‘not eligible’, and so on. Whilst all of these designations indicate a different set of personal circumstances, each designator was used in their interaction to orientate the conversation towards producing a reason for as to why, for the task at hand, the client could or could not be considered as a potential candidate.

In the following extracts (transcripts D and E), this categorising involves producing *intervention tales* that are sequentially organised descriptions of previous encounters between staff and clients. These tales invoke prior encounters to display how clients have conducted themselves in interactions with staff. These tales reflexively narrate the limits that staff are willing to go in assisting clients on the project. That is to say, these tales display how staff had instructed clients, how these instructions had been acted upon, what moral assessments are available through these reports of clients and staff interactions, and what other actors are drawn in to the employment intervention. This need not imply that staff have an ideal client against which they measure all others. Indeed, the immediate trouble visible in these extracts

is for staff to find suitable clients who have expressed an interest in the currently available vacancies. As one of the project team explained about troubles with this task, ‘and we’ve told you this before, it is our hardest sector to fill. I think people hear, uh kitchen assistant, and it’s, oh, I’m not washing up, I’m not peeling potatoes. You know, things like that.’ In finding clients to put forward for vacancies, this next extract shows staff members’ orientation to a quick succession of clients who are not selected as candidates. For these cases, staff skim through a set of registration documents for clients that would not be suitable for the current vacancies.

These extracts also show that it is not possible to adequately understand the descriptor ‘hard to engage’ in terms of etymological definitions nor in reference to administrative documents used by the project team. Instead, as a designation, it constituted an interpretive resource through which to index the project-relevant characteristics of a client. As J. William Spencer (2001: 159) has detailed, the institutional identity of clients in receipt of human services is dependent upon the way that an ‘institutional discourse provides the conditions of possibility for constructing persons and their troubles’. In order to make sense of how descriptions were used to review clients for vacancies, it is necessary to focus on how staff cited details from documentary sources and memories of prior encounters. These recollections were not systematically recorded on standard forms or the agency-wide, digital record-keeping system, the Network Register. In this sense, how members of staff use *intervention tales* provides a visible method with which to show professionals, in the words of Rick Hood, actually talk about complex cases (Hood 2016).

In the following transcript, the members of staff are midway through their review of the client folder.



## Transcript D

- S1: Uh Keith, he's disengaged, didn't he?  
S2: Mm, what else did he want, Susan?  
S1: He just wanted something outside, driver's mate, (employer name)?  
S2: They're- they've shortlisted  
S1: Okay, well that's good anyway, Lucy is out, she's got her job, Marnie (surname), is there any point in putting her forward again?  
S2: Uhm, I would say no at this point, just purely because she's already had interviews there  
S1: Yeah  
S2: And if we can manage to, get a new day sorted out, it's- I just feel that it would be a waste of her time and I just don't want her to be put through that to get a no again  
S1: Matthew, we got him a job  
S2: Yeah  
S1: Marvin (surname)  
S2: Marvin works  
S1: He's got a job?  
S2: Yeah, he was the guy with the really deep voice, um, he works in construction  
S1: Oh I remember him now, yeah

For the first client, Kevin, he is 'disengaged', available for work, but given his preference for 'something outside' is only treated as eligible for a vacancy that has been 'shortlisted'. This first case goes against the notion that 'disengaged' clients are dismissed as unsuitable for candidate status. We can see that S2 acknowledges S1's question about Kevin having 'disengaged', then re-orientates towards what roles Kevin was seeking. The inquiry is not settled until staff display an answer to 'what else did he want'. Three clients are then briefly surveyed, each of whom are working. Though each of these clients are employed, the attributes of the job is marked by lexical attributions of how the job was found: 'got her job', 'got him a job', 'he's got a job'.

Marnie presents a different subject for discussion. In her case, we can see another feature of how intervention tales are used by staff to detail the reasons for and against putting clients forward for roles. As 'she has already had interviews there', the staff member provides a reason for not granting candidate status to Marnie. The justification that 'I just feel like it would be a waste of her time' seems to indicate the assumption that this employer will not

come to a different decision this time around. In this case, an intervention tale contains consequential details about previous interactions with clients, giving grounds for what actions should be taken in the present and future, joined to displays that account for a clients' time and the way that employers make decisions about hiring applicants. None of these details are to be found on the client's registration form. Each of these quick-fire citations of client names resemble condensed versions of end-of-shift 'handoff routines' in health practice. LeBaron and co-authors (2016) describe how physicians' 'handoffs' involve the work of coordinating sequentially organised, embodied talk. The authors show how physicians' actions coordinate 'handoffs' through a flexible, negotiated ordering of 'moves'. This flexible set of moves may involve the patient's name, family matters, adjacent patients, major issues, past events, and so on.

Intervention tales are thus not solely concerned with ensuring compliance with organisational rules and project policies. Instead they account for what has happened with individual clients in a series of encounters and in ways that are intelligible to the relevant concerns of implementing the project. In this sense they resemble what Albert Meehan (1986) has described as a 'running record'. Meehan describes how police officers keep track of routine interactions with juveniles that are left unrecorded in log books. This running record is treated by police officers as a shared resource for interpreting and justifying future interactions with juveniles in the context of professional and organisational expectations. On the wage subsidy project, although clients are not required to undertake mandatory actions like attending the offices on a routine basis, their ongoing participation is dependent upon, amongst other perceived characteristics, 'being available' when opportunities arise and staying in contact with staff. The following intervention tale shows how staff work together to interpret how a client has comported herself, and by doing so finds the basis upon which to justify whether or not to put her forward for vacancies. In this way, staff account for clients in

ways that are unrecorded on standard forms or the record-keeping system, but can draw from these sources in order to do interpretive work.

This points to an issue about whether the project team, if considered as ‘street level bureaucrats’, could be said to be applying ‘discretion’ in sanctioning clients in order to ensure compliance with project outcomes. In discussing street level bureaucrats, Michael Lipsky (2010) put forward the notion that client-focused workers in a variety of professions, including public employment agencies, have a varying degree of discretionary powers about punitively sanctioning client conduct. The following ‘intervention tales’ show how staff use workplace conversations to justify the use of discretionary judgement about how to work with individual clients through citing evidence. In the course of talking through a folder of client documents, staff work together to interpret *who* is suitable for vacancies by referring to a client’s current employment status, conduct and receptivity to staff members’ advice and instructions. In this way, ‘intervention tales’ display a method whereby staff make sense of just how a client’s ongoing participation in the project should be configured. These tales treat prior interactions as one source of evidence about clients. Although the notion of ‘discretion’ cannot explain how staff apply their judgement through attentiveness to specific circumstantial details, by analysing the following extracts the rest of the chapter describes how discretion is accomplished by ‘citing evidence’ from documentary records and registration forms, and through reciting prior encounters with clients. Certainly these *intervention tales* are used with discretion in the sense that staff have the capacity to make claims about how to interpret troubles in the conduct of clients. Beyond this, the evidence that staff cite does not solely centre on clients for ‘person-descriptions’, but recounts details about the lengths that staff have gone to in attempts to enrol clients within the project. In order to describe how these tales are expressed by project members in talk and documentation, it is necessary to attend to what details are cited as circumstantially relevant.

The following extract provides an example that displays an initial, tentatively posed identity for Rosanna with affective expressions of annoyance and a moral injunction for clients to display ‘willingness’.

### Transcript E

- S1: Rosanna, um, do you remember Rosanna?  
S2: Let’s have a look at her ( ), oh yes I do I think, I think she come down with Devin  
S1: No  
S2: No?  
S1: Was it her? Because I saw her and I didn’t ( ) the action plan for her, yes it was  
S2: It was  
S1: She couldn’t open, yeah  
S2: She, I think she’s going to college isn’t she?  
S1: She’s not doing anything, but I, and I-, I spoke to- I spoke to Devin about her and he said oh she’s still not doing nothing and I told- I advised her to come back to you, I said yeah, anytime, just that I need to hear, you know  
S2: Mmm  
S1: Show me some willingness  
S2: Absolutely  
S1: It’s just a case of sitting down here for half an hour, forty five [minutes  
S2: [Yeah  
S1: And I’m not actually getting anything back, so I [couldn’t see as ( )  
S2: [No, she’ll be out of work  
S2: What, what- what was she looking for Susan?  
S1: She was looking for, it was, retail childcare, um hospitality or admin  
S2: Put her in the hospitality pile

The staff initially work together to clarify Rosanna’s identity. This is collaboratively accomplished by asking to see the action plan form, venturing a guess that is disconfirmed, and then again referring to the action plan form. ‘Yes it was,’ marks alignment in who they are talking about. One of the staff suggests that the client is going to college, which is contested in the next turn in which an intervention tale is launched. This tale is used to display an appraisal of how the staff member’s offer for the client to get in contact was responded to. This offer contrasts with the version of what the client is doing provided by

Devin, an advisor at a partner organisation who refers clients to the team. He is reported to have said that the client is ‘doing nothing’. The tale builds the case that, as Rosanna is ‘doing nothing’, she should be getting in contact. ‘Doing nothing,’ on this occasion, generates a context in which to interpret Rosanna’s inaction as a lack of reciprocal engagement. The description provides an appraisal of whether the client meets the project criteria of ‘out of work’ and what to make of the client’s conduct because, although they are ‘doing nothing’, they still have not stayed in contact.

Appraising the client in this way makes a general expectation about client conduct partly visible by stating the need for clients to reciprocate staff members’ efforts to stay in contact: ‘Just that I need to hear’. It also provides grounds for calling upon the other staff member to agree for the need for this client to ‘Show me some willingness’. Given these considerations at play in the intervention tale, and whilst this client may seem to be ‘hard to engage’, the orientation towards retrieving ‘what she was looking for’ from the client’s form leads to the client name being put in the mix. As S2 instructs, ‘put her in the hospitality pile’.

Readers can see in this extract that the two staff members are using the occasion to organise the client caseload into ‘piles’, i.e. the hospitality pile that Rosanna’s forms are placed on. The staff members inspect each of the documents to locate information that was noted during an in-take meeting. This information on this administrative form is, in Andrew Carlin’s (2003) terms, available ‘at-a-glance’. And yet, in Rosanna’s case, staff members turn to the document to search for one piece of information: ‘what was she looking for’. The document and the intervention tales are thereby both used as resources for the accomplishment of this routine sorting of clients to put forward for ‘live vacancies’.

The next example elaborates shows how *intervention tales* are used to put clients within an interpretive framework that involves other responsible actors. In contrast with the

previous extract where Devin is not held responsible for Rosanna's conduct, Ray Shaun's 'mum' is drawn into the centre of the intervention tale.

### Transcript F

- S1: What about Ray Shaun? This was my one, I had action planned him, Ray Shaun, I then, he came, I then, he came in, I remember him, he was nine- seventeen, he came in with his mum, we had a lovely chat, he spoke quite openly, um, wanted to do football coaching and all, all sorts of things, but at the time it was for (employer name & job title), and, that's it, down
- S2: Ah okay
- S1: He was supposed to send me his, CV
- S2: Never got it
- S1: Phoned him about three times
- S2: Yeah
- S1: That's how, I was really confident in him, he just didn't, bother answering my calls, and then I, I went to, I phoned the landline, thinking I'll speak to his mum
- S2: Yeah definitely
- S1: Cos his mum was with him, and [she was really encour- and I thought, you
- S2: [Yeah
- S1: Know, I'll speak to the [mum and say, you know, what happened to Ray Shaun?
- S2: [Yeah definitely
- S1: She didn't call- get back to me either, I left a message for her, so you know, there's only so much I think you can do
- S2: Definitely
- S1: Do you know what I mean? As much as I want them to succeed and I see their potential I just think, oh you got to give me a little bit more
- S2: They have to do it for [themselves
- S1: [Yeah I can't do everything [for you
- S2: [No
- S1: I can't go to the interview, I can't tell them how great you are, you've got to tell them how great you are
- S2: Exactly girl

This last extract has sought to describe the routine interplay of talk and documents in deciding about how to organise the client caseload and what how client conduct is accountable to their requirements for fulfilling live vacancies. The staff, in Anderson's terms (1997), display 'witcraft' in justifying their appraisals of client conduct. The analysis of a small number of cases has shown how *intervention tales* constitute a flexible resource that

staff members use to formulate historical details about their contact with members of the client caseload. The fact that these tales are told in the course of meetings where staff members practically decide how to implement the project is instructive for researchers interested in social problems work. For one, these tales are used to describe client actions and characteristics in ways that are not locatable on organisational documents. The use of tales is, however, also prompted by the ‘chronic insufficiency of standard forms’ (Moore *et al* 2011: 185), and what does not need to be included in organisational records. Each of the examples used in this chapter have shown how these tales are used to display clients’ ‘engagement’ with the project.

The practical use of these descriptions presents routine aspects of the work of implementing the wage subsidy project. In the present cases, the tales are principally used to show how a client has been seen to respond to staff requests, requirements and advice. The tales evidence how staff members have sought to initiate interventions with specific clients by, for example offering interviews, or inviting clients to attend Action Plan sessions. Clients are accountable when they are seen not to reciprocate these intervention efforts. This lack of reciprocity and ‘engagement’ is located within *intervention tales* to evidence ‘some issue’ with a client. These tales thereby offer a resource for staff with which to display issues about clients. The issues may be a ‘lack of reciprocity’, they may involve a client ‘wanting something outside’ of the project, or that a client has already had a previous interview which means offering a new one would be a ‘waste of her time’. As such, *intervention tales* are a practical resource for staff members’ to describe a client, to show the rational basis for staff members’ stances, to add to staff members’ shared knowledge of the client caseload, and as evidence for deciding whether to select or not select clients to ‘put them in the mix’ and put them forward for interviews.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

The chapter has focused on the organisation of ordinary activities by members of staff whilst they implement a wage subsidy project for NEETs in an inner London borough. The chapter described how members of this team used documentary practices to undertake this intervention work by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork. By describing how members of staff at the Network and the NEET project team talked about and documented their work with NEETs and other client groups, the chapter focuses on what staff did to enrol participations through madding and using records of interactions in documents and records. In doing so, the chapter describes how staff used documents to make sense of clients in intervention work by coordinating the understanding of members of the project team about course of action. Staff made sense of the identity of youth cohorts through using these reports to document their interactions with clients. These documentary practices are used to undertake mundane activities within the context of the NEET project and the team's relation to management and commissioning agents. Staff made sense of routine 'troubles' with implementing the project by using these reports to evidence and document these troubles. Whether these were troubles with participants who had *dropped out* of work placements, who could not be registered or referred due to program requirements or Network's policies, or clients who were not displaying sufficient engagement with the project staff, these documents were used to record a variety of practically relevant information.

The chapter sought to contribute to a set of ethnomethodological studies that have focused on the sense making practices through which professionals produce and make use of documentary records within organisational settings. This chapter sought to focus on some specific 'texts-in-use' during the course of undertaking routine intervention with on a NEET wage-subsidy project. Staff use, and are required to use, a lot of specific documents and texts in order to undertake their work: the Network 'register', registration forms, action plans,



quarterly narrative reports, and the RAG report, to name but a few. Members of staff are required to be skilled in understanding the relevance of each of these documents and the kinds of writing practices that are required for their competent production. In order to analyse the way that interventions are organised and implemented within specific settings it is necessary to consider how, in light of the specific requirements to document their daily work. The chapter has sought to offer detailed descriptions of examples where staff use practical knowledge, cultural resources to reflexively use documentary records to organise their work and the contingencies of delivering NEET interventions.

The following chapters seeks to build on this initial examination of intervention work by looking at another set of ordinary activities associated with working with NEET cohorts. Instead of describing the documentary practices used by program staff, the chapter discusses practices of accounting for the participation of cohorts of clients on a NEET traineeship program. This will build on aspects of this current chapter which have discussed storytelling and descriptive practices, such as the use of ‘intervention tales’ when staff suggest clients to ‘put in the mix’ for ‘live vacancies’. The chapter will draw from fieldwork with a group of youth workers delivering a traineeship program in order to examine the mundane practices which are routinely used to make sense of young people’s program-relevant identity.

## **FIVE.            Making Sense of Participation on a Traineeship Program**

TRAINEE: ‘What’s a NEET?’

The chapter describes how intervention work involves staff members’ describing the observed and reported conduct of groups of NEETs on a traineeship program. I frame this idea as *making sense of participation* to order to contrast with how ‘participation’ will be analysed in Chapter Six when we will discuss the duty to report the ‘participation status’ of young people in forms of education, training, etc. This chapter will focus on participation in the sense of monitoring and ongoing observations made about program participations by a team of youth workers running the daily operations of the NEET traineeship. This will draw on fieldwork with this team of youth workers running the daily operations of the traineeship with around fifteen young people in an inner London borough. To do this work staff were responsible for signing up new trainees, opening up the offices each morning, completing a register of attendance, handing out lunch vouchers, organising onsite and offsite activities, offering ‘informal education’, and so on. In this chapter I approach the notion of participation through the work that staff members undertake to make casual, passing, off-hand descriptions about trainees’ conduct as a way to get through their daily tasks. The chapter thereby focuses on another aspect of the interactional practices associated with intervention work. Staff members’ daily work involved producing descriptions of participation which did not need to be comprehensively recorded in administrative forms, such as ‘daily debriefing sheets’ (see

Figure 4.4). Indeed, the requirement to produce daily debriefing sheets often seemed to be an afterthought at the end of a long day. However, this team of youth workers needed to be skilled in the practice of accounting for the participation of young people in passing talk, and if need be, on either ‘daily debriefing sheets’ or ‘incident forms’, and also be able to appropriately read and interpret the entries on sets of documents used to refer trainees to the program. Instead of analysing copies of these documents, the chapter proceeded to examine a different kind of accounting work that staff used to describe the observed conduct of trainees as well as other staff. This accounting work involves observing and describing the participation of young people in terms of their ‘program-relevant identity’. Staff talked about a young person’s participation in varied terms: whether a young person would be a good addition to the group and whether they would help ‘make a team’; whether the young person would be moved towards a college course by participating in the course; whether they would cause trouble with other participants. This ongoing work was just as relevant though not required to be routinely recorded in written form.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Each of these focus on how descriptive practices about participation are put to use by staff in the course of conducting ordinary activities. These sections provide examples about the knowledge on display in the way that staff conducted mundane observations and accounted for the participation of trainees. The first section describes how staff talked about themselves as workers on the project at a graduation ceremony. A graduation ceremony offers an interesting case with which to revisit Erving Goffman’s (1971) notion that *greeting* and *farewells* are, as he calls them, ‘access rituals’. The ceremony thereby offers an occasion for staff to publicly display what they did on a daily basis whilst subsequently managing the progression of the event during which they described the kinds of support that they offered and would continue to offer to trainees. The second section presents a contrasting narrative about another farewell from the program, that

of the employability tutor prior. I draw from fieldnotes during the last day of the tutor's participation with the program team to describe how she described her work with the team, how she describes her work with the team and with the program, and what staff did to produce an account which made sense of her departure from the program. The third section examines how staff made observations during the course of signing up a new cohort of trainees during intake interviews and 'taster days. As these 'first impressions' were being recounted about the new cohort, staff talked about the new group of trainees in reference to their knowledge of a young person's referral process, their conduct at initial interviews, gossip and rumours about them, and observations of their interactions with other trainees during taster sessions. This can involve making inferences about a young person due to 'authoritative involvement' of a referral process (Emerson 2015: 206-248) or about where a young person currently lives, supported by a set of expectations about normal behaviour of young people who joined the program. At the end of this section I offer a preliminary scheme that staff tacitly use in these initial stages in order to produce shared reasoned accounts about the program-relevant identity of trainees and what consequences this identity has for running the program.

### *5.1 NEET 31 and 32's graduation ceremony*

The invitation to the graduation ceremony that I received by email from Hayley, the senior youth manager, indicated that the graduation ceremony would start at about five thirty and finish at eight. It had been around four months since I had started to come to the centre to spent time with staff, and over a year since I had first got in contact with Hayley about conducting research with the traineeship program. In all, I ended up visiting the building on about fifteen days. By this date, my agreement for accessing the field site and visiting sessions for one group of NEET trainees had had to change as timetables were revised after

training providers withdrew their partnership arrangements with the local authority youth service.

The traineeship offices were located in a large, recently built, multi-functional three floor youth and community centre. The youth workers shared the building with staff from the local authority pupil referral unit. Each evening a youth club was run out of the youth and community centre's large hall, and rock climbing wall, all-weather sports pitches, and other offices. On a tour of the building given on my first day, one of the youth workers, Kieron, showed me around the canteen that rarely opens, and the hall where a youth club runs each evening. He gave instructions about how to follow emergency procedures and how to take a young person out of a side entrance so as to avoid fights around the entrance of the building. As staff prepared for the possibility that there would be physical fights, incidents occurred that led to the building being put on 'lockdown'. As a field site, it could be said that the goings on at the building and the street were known to 'spill over' into each other, and that staff recognised and prepared for potential violent altercations (Contreras 2015). There is a rich literature on the relationship between young people and the poetics, politics, semiotics and pragmatics of space and place which we do not have space to describe here (Gieryn 2002; Yanow 2006; Landhal 2013; Thompson, Russell and Simmons 2014). As this chapter focuses upon a relatively narrow location in which the observations were collected, one building, this space needs to be described in specific, rather than, theoretical terms.

Upon arriving for the graduation ceremony, I signed in at the front desk, where my presence was already observable both on a video monitor placed behind the reception desk, which broadcasted live feeds from cameras placed around the building, and from the large, floor-to-ceiling windows of the traineeship offices on the first floor which looked out over the front entrance and foyer. Both of these lines of sight offered an angle from which traineeship staff could monitor the comings and goings at the building. This way of thinking about being

in this space was suggested by one of the buildings' architects, who told me during a telephone interview that the open space provided 'informal surveillance'. This reduced, he said, the need for CCTV cameras. In co-designing the building with the local authority, local stakeholders, and through public consultations, the architects' idea was to produce an open-plan building with large, flexible spaces in which people would not be hidden away in offices. The design set out to produce a 'welcoming and generous space, with no large thresholds to get over before entering the building'. In this way it is, he said, a 'programmable space, which makes it very comfortable and because it is theatrical, it brings people to life.'

On the first floor, where the traineeship office was located, four spaces, separated by glass were used by the team of youth workers. The traineeship office was filled with desks, computers, pin-boards, filing cabinets and kitchen facilities. Outside the office was an open space with fold out tables, a snooker table, storage units, three sofas, printers and access to bathrooms; a main room which was mostly used as a training space, with stacked chairs and fold-away tables to set up as required; and lastly, a small balcony off of the back of the training space, with chairs and bean bags. These four spaces, separated by glass, afforded 'informal surveillance' by open lines of sight that gave a sense that staff and trainees were constantly, partially visible to everyone else on that floor. These lines of sight crossed the traineeship program office windows to the front entrance, from the main room to the traineeship program office, from the stairwell up to the program office. For most positions on the first floor, everybody on that floor was within your gaze, with glass windows providing some soundproofing. This however did not necessarily produce an architectural space which expressed the power to enforce discipline through a 'normalizing judgement' (Foucault 1991: 177-183). What it did provide is an ability to observe, and thereby allowed staff to monitor trainees and trainees to monitor staff. In this sense, the open space allowed lines of sight so as

to become and stay aware of who is where on the first two floors at any one time. It allowed, for example, staff to ensure that those young people who were not allowed to be left alone in offices, were not left unattended. In this simple following of a rule there was a clear hierarchy about 'who could be left alone in offices (on the topic of 'hierarchy' in office spaces, see Zhang and Spicer 2013).

Upon arriving at the centre for the graduation ceremony, as much as I was familiar with the layout of the building and where the program office was located, so too was I aware that staff and young people would be looking to see who had arrived through the entrance, I felt the need to comport my body in a way that displayed indifference to the possibility of being observed. Upstairs in the office, staff members and trainees sat waiting for the graduation ceremony to start. Lorna, a former participant and volunteer on the last [three] programs greeted me by asking 'where have you been?' I was not sure how to answer, I put my bag down and stood in the doorway. 'At the library.' I responded as if Lorna was asking about today, though she was more likely asking where I had been for the last few weeks of the program. 'Lorna's your manager now,' Hayley teased before asking the group of trainees whether they had seen, or still speak to a couple of other trainees who were not there. Hayley later told me that there are a few people missing from today's graduation ceremony. One of the missing people, Henry, is not allowed to attend, and will be taking his exams separately due to assaulting another trainee. Kevin has been kicked off the course because he stopped turning up.

Hayley continued to try to track down trainees on their phones or at home, leaving voicemails, messages, texts and making enquiries about whether trainees had set off to get to the ceremony. Seeing someone at the entrance, Lorna turned to the senior youth worker: 'Guess who just came in?' To which Hayley asked: 'Who?' Kieron is putting certificates in

brown envelopes. Hayley continued calling trainees. This time to Michael's mobile. When Michael answered Hayley asked, 'where are you?'

Sitting in the office, young people bring up matters about their work experience. One of the trainees, whilst in the office explains that he had not seen his manager more than two times in four weeks. Hayley, the senior youth worker, explained that she often does not see her manager for many days. Kieron seems to support that claim. In answering these questions and giving a point of view on matters arising during the trainee's work experience, the youth workers' respond in a way that marks the news about absent managers as ordinary. It is an ordinary observation about any job and any manager. Another young person said that they do not have anything to do on their work experience placement. Another said that they still had not found out where they are going to do their placement. The senior youth worker then announces that we had all best make a start. The group begins to move from the office into the training space. We are instructed to seat ourselves according to which cohort we are in. NEET 31 are to sit on one side, NEET 32 on the other, with parents, carers, training providers, and so on, sitting in the last three rows. Hayley asks, 'Calvin, Calvin, do you want to come in and sit at the front please?'

In answering questions, phoning absent participants, moving the group from one room to another, arranging the seating, starting proceedings, the staff member's work attends to producing scenes in which this traineeship program is seen to have been implemented. Hayley, faced the seat audience, standing next to Lorna and Kyron, began the proceedings. The traineeship, Hayley began telling the audience, 'provides informal education in English and Maths for young people that are not in education, employment or training, and gives them support in terms of moving on their next steps in whichever direction they wish to take.' And whilst the set of possible directions were open, in order to complete the program and to get on to these next steps, certain activities needed to be undertaken. Hayley then gave an



overview of the program, itemising what the two groups had done from week one to thirteen. ‘Team building, getting to know each other, finding out what their strengths and their weaknesses are... we do lots of fun stuff, some groups did snow camp, a nutritionist came in, we also looked at your strengths and weaknesses in terms of going into a workplace... weeks five through seven, we looked at your interview techniques’. In narrating this list of activities, each of the sessions and workshops, external providers and staff, made sense as an elemental order of what they had done together. Hayley’s presentation accounted for what their work could be said to have been about.

As the event was partially open to the public, in the sense that it was not just staff and trainees who were invited, but also parents, carers, and other local authority staff, the event proceeded in a tightly organised matter. There were a preliminary waiting period, initiation of the event, initial speeches from staff about their work, the awarding of certificates to trainees, one group at a time, each trainee brought up to the front of the audience was invited to ‘say a few words’, a breaking out into small, self-selected groupings and then closing the event. All in all, this event could be considered, what Erving Goffman has called, a ‘farewell’ ritual between staff and trainees. ‘Taken together, greetings and farewells provide ritual brackets around a spate of activity – punctuation marks as it were – and ought therefore to be considered together’ (1971). As such an event ‘mark a change in degrees of access’ that trainees have to this program. Farewells, Goffman writes, ‘are orientated not to the termination of the social occasion or sociable moment wherein it takes place but to the sharp decrease that is about to occur in the possibility of such comings-together again occurring – at least for a time’ (1971: 88).

Now that this work was coming to an end with these two cohorts of trainees, these announcements different members of the assembled groups. ‘And then the last two weeks was finishing off the last of your work experience hours, um, sitting your exams for English

and Maths which, all of you,’ she paused to glance around the room, ‘just double check, yeah, all of you have passed, that’s here.’ The matter was different for those who were not there. Some of the group were described as having ‘worked really, really hard’ and finished their work experience placement. ‘So some of you have worked really, really hard. I know a few of you have got, just, the last few hours of your work experience placements to finish off... But all of you have passed the elements on the program.’ The notion that trainees have ‘worked hard’ is treated as a positive evaluation. As with the discussion of Andrew Dunn in the previous chapter, this is a ‘lay’ and ‘professional’, albeit a non-sociological, reference to a ‘work ethic’. That only ‘some’ of the participants have worked hard vaguely implies that some of those present had not worked ‘really, really hard’. This can be heard to imply that some had not ‘worked hard’ rather than some have worked ‘really hard’ or ‘really, really, really hard’.

Before the certificates were handed out, each of the staff members gave an account of their role on the program and how they had worked with trainees. These accounts offered a description of their stance towards trainees, and these two specific cohorts of assembled trainees. This was done by identifying trainees interchangeably by name, as young people, citizens, as NEETs, and so on. The following extracts offer up examples of how, in accounting for their work, staff members practice for producing these short descriptions which make their roles relevant to the assembled audience. It is thus, as with other features of institutional talk, ‘recipient designed’, shaped by speakers’ knowledge of institutional settings and their understanding of institutional activities such as graduating (Heritage and Clayman 2010).

Kieron offers the first example of a self-description by reflexively orientating each aspect of his account about ‘my job’ to a ‘you’, an ‘everyone’, who are identified as part of the assembled audience.

So, as for the qualifications, um Hayley explained the main ones you got, but, to make up to twenty five you get um a lot of AQA awards, and my job is to monitor every one of you lot to make sure, that you lot get um the rewards that suit you lot. And um, everyone here has got more than eleven AQA awards in twelve weeks which is pretty impressive. Um, think you lot did really well, both groups did really, really well

Following this, Hayley introduced Lorna by inviting her to offer an account about ‘what you’ve done’. Lorna treats this as relating to her role as a volunteer supporting the program participants and orientates to the cohorts in terms of being ‘around my age group’.

HAYLEY: so, Lorna do you want to just say a little bit about what you’ve done, and the experience

LORNA: so yeah um my name’s Lorna, um I’m- I’m a- I’m a volunteer now, it’s just been so nice to see, everyone like, literally around my age group, to do so good, coming from, kicked out of school or whatever situation, um, to see you lot, come from so little to grow, massively, in- it’s so good like, makes me happy because I’m your age and stuff, so yeah nah, it’s really nice to see you lot, and grow, and I see so much potential in a lot of you, um, all of you, um just go to push yourself and well, you’ll get there, so yeah, that’s it.

This was followed by Sharleen who introduces herself with reference to a job title – ‘one of the area coordinators’ – and then produced an account about what this involved when interacting with the cohort and the ‘NEET team’.

Um, my name’s Sharleen, and I’m one of the area coordinators for the Youth Service, um, I oversee the wonderful NEET team, um, I often pop up here when I’m called whether it’s an emergency, a non-emergency, to collect some paperwork, to congratulate (some) people or to have a discussion of who’s gonna go on residential and who’s not gonna not have to go on residential, so sometimes I have to make that horrible, so I suppose I’m the nasty one if need be, if there needs to be a nasty one.

She then goes on to distinguish the substance of this interaction with the ‘second group’, NEET 32. This is followed by an account that sketches out the principles behind and policy towards working with ‘young people’ that have been ‘lost... on the way’.

The second group had a little bit more involvement in the beginning, of the group, um, but when young people are NEET, you often have lots of faces that change, so we have lost some young people on the way and we’ve gained some new people, um, and some new people that we lost along the way we may invite back as part of the um, because we want to get them to EET, so even if they drop off, it depends what time and what stage they are in their process, so we do invite them back- invite them back sometimes.

Sharleen addresses a different sense of the group than Kieron and Lorna. This is done through Sharleen’s reference to ‘some new people that we lost along the way’ and accounting for the relevance of this group. Here, the consideration is not with meeting AQA award standards of being the same age as the group. Sharleen also offers an observed tendency about NEETs, ‘when young people are NEETs, you often have lots of faces that change’. Instead it is about account for other characteristics of the group, or NEETs in general and the principles of working with NEETs. Sharleen offers a general principle to this end, ‘we want to get them back to EET’.

The group that Sharleen refers to in her account is a category of persons produced through their participation with the group, unlike identity characteristics such as an age group or gender. Instead it comprises trainees who are no longer ‘on the program’, but once were. This is a cohort category produced through the group’s interaction with the program. Such an identity category also gives a rationale for why some of the group are not in attendance. In the sense that they have been ‘lost’, the designation is given further sense by suggesting they have ‘dropped off’. Sharleen also formulates an axiom about whether she and the team will

continue to work with them: the team may work with them again, even if certain actions have taken place, depending on when – the ‘time’ or ‘stage’ – the ‘dropping out’ happened.

Following on from this, Kieron then extended an invitation to the assembled group to continue to work with the staff. The terms of this invitation are indicated through a set of suggested activities that they can undertake.

Can I just add as well, just because the program’s over, um, our work is not finished with you guys, our door is always open, um, we’ve here to um update your CVs again, we’re here to help you apply for college, help you apply for employment, even take you to an interview if you need it, so just because (the) program is finished, the work’s not, it’s not stopped yeah, so don’t- don’t hesitate to come and see us and ask for help if you (want or need it) again.

The staff members’ accounts of their involvement with the cohorts do not, strictly speaking, at least in the extracted quotes, name specific conduct which is to be commended or criticised amongst the group. These descriptions name what staff members can be said to have done in relation to running the program, their stance towards the cohort, and how they coordinate between each other as staff. These accounts described what staff and the trainees have done together to achieve a set of organisationally recognised outcomes, such as AQA awards. Each staff member tells the assembled group about their own job role, what they have and can do, and how their actions fit into an overarching set of coordinated activities, something that trainees will have observed during the duration of the traineeship.

These descriptions thereby provide a way to interpret what is involved in organising the program. It is recipient designed in the sense that the statements orientate to the observed fact that the event is attended by trainees, parents, cares, and other local authority staff. This is done by providing a description that displays how each member relates to the present cohort, with a set of institutionally and common-sense membership categories: ‘you lot’, ‘my

age group', 'kicked out from school', 'young people', 'new people'. These categories provide sense making devices that organise what to make of how staff relate to them through official designations. The categories that staff use to introduce to describe themselves also offers non-standard modifications of their 'official' titles, 'my job is to monitor', 'I'm your age', 'the nasty one'. These designations are used to describe their role to the assembled audience but also by displaying recognisable interpretations of their role.

Upon leaving it strikes me that whilst the graduation ceremony is thought of as an evening of celebration also marks the end of the trainees' involvement in the program, and also marks when the groups technically become NEET again. In the rest of the event we heard that Hayley was proud of one of the trainees because she had found a job at a nursery. Hayley says that this trainee would barely speak to staff when she first arrived. Another trainee tells us that he was grateful because he had 'problems at the start of the year' and the course had helped him out. At the back of the room, once the ceremony had been drawn to a conclusion, I joined the graduating trainees and asked about the gift vouchers received in the envelope with the certificates and what people's future plans were. Daniel said he wanted to do football coaching for a year and then find something else after going to college. Another was going to come in next week and find out about applying for IT courses at college. And one says he plans to 'take over the world', then sang the theme song to the cartoon, 'Pinky and the Brain'.

The way that members of staff formulate their interaction with trainees indicate how their observations about the conduct of trainees exceeds the description that staff gave in the introduction about the roles they took on the program. Indeed, the observations that staff made about how to keep trainees 'on track' required that they describe to each other their observations of trainee conduct. The relationship between trainees and members of staff therefore does not mean that trainees can be treated as a type of, strictly speaking, 'clients',

‘jobseekers’, ‘students’, nor ‘young people from the neighbourhood’, ‘local authority residents’, or ‘service recipients’. The certified educational component of the traineeship is provided by external agencies, namely tutors from a further education college, and members of staff described their role as to provide ‘informal educational’ opportunities. Staff member’s descriptions do not indicate that the trainees are ‘clients’ in the sense that they can make open-ended demands upon service providers. They can make requests for undertaking specific support activities (applying for college, applying for jobs, improving CVs, attending job interviews). The trainees can be excluded from the traineeship due to observed conduct. There is an expectation that trainees will complete a set number of work experience hours, although this is not ‘enforced’ as a strict duty. There is discretionary financial support for trainees travel and food provided on a daily basis. The graduation ceremony bears the characteristics of ritual events in educational institutions. The trainees’ age was topicalised by a volunteer, Lorna, and is treated as relevant to their status as trainees. In this sense, being a shared age category marks the group as having shared attributes and experiences. Members of staff ‘chase up’ young people who are not in attendance by mobile phone, with the expectation that they will be in attendance at a specific time. Members of staff are known to retain the ‘right’ to make decisions about whether trainees can and cannot undertake activities on the traineeship. There is a reported expectation that trainees will arrive on time for this event. Trainees are asked to account for why they have not arrived for the ceremony. The event will not start until these trainees arrive. Members of staff can exclude trainees for a number of reasons. Two reasons are given here, one for ‘persistent absence’ and one for ‘assaulting’ another trainee. This conduct is treated as reasonable grounds for excludable specific trainees from attending the traineeship. The next section turns to describe how a member of staff resigned from working on the project. The last sections build on the analysis

of how members of staff made sense of trainees' participation by describing how staff talked and reasoned about the identity of prospective NEET trainees.

## 5.2 *The employability tutor*

This section described the resignation of an employability tutor, Chelsea, from the program. I describe how Chelsea resigned from delivering careers and employment component of the program, and how this resignation was done through interactions with different members of staff. This resignation caused some noticeable problems as no replacement was available at this short notice. Members of staff suggested that I take over and deliver this component of the program. On the day that Chelsea resigned, I arrived mid-morning, with two of the youth workers, one volunteer, two trainees, and Chelsea in the office.

She told me about her work between meetings with young people. She told me that her boss is 'very left wing' and his public comments about employment programs have been controversial. She directs me to look up his comments. They generally argue, she said, that the DWP Work Programme is not fit for purpose and that mandatory work schemes are, in reality, forced labour. We discuss how we had both worked in the same office building. She frequently 'hot desks' at Jobcentre offices. She sees the odd power dynamics when working from these offices and overhears strange conversations between staff members discussing jobseekers. Her critique of the Jobcentre seemed to involve an assessment that staff are, as she called them, 'benefit checkers'. In this way, her critique is not dissimilar from David Price's (2000) claim that employment services can be orientated to a 'benefit control' model. Jobcentre staff, she says are not there to help people to find employment. Instead it is left to her organisation does the work that they themselves should be doing. She says that she is working on a new pilot project for low-income employees in London. This has been put



together with her organisation, a prominent think tank and a group of London local authorities. Her own role means she is 'focused on delivery'. When she is not based at the traineeship or Jobcentre offices she is between different locations, either working one-to-one or in workshops.

Chelsea came to the office to meet with trainees today. She sat with a trainee on the sofa outside the team office. She told the trainee about future job opportunities. 'That would be a wicked job for you,' she said. 'That would actually be a really cool job.' In fact, she has 'loads of jobs that come my way now.' The variety of these jobs are also noteworthy. She told me that she has arranged internships at the Houses of Parliament. There are also jobs in the creative, media and arts sectors. 'I can give you an example of some jobs we have now, but this changes every day.'

Although Chelsea had no explicit status as a member of the local authority youth services, other members of staff did not object when she made assessments about trainees. One of the youth workers asked Chelsea whether Aliyah will be joining the group. 'I think she is too good for the program,' Chelsea replied. She said that she may decide to pay for her to complete her Level 2 English and Maths qualifications from another provider. Daniel asked whether this Aliyah had a young sister who would join the program. Speaking about another trainee who came to the offices for an interview, she asked: 'Are all the boys like that?' Kieron replied: 'Short white guys? A bit funny?' 'No,' she clarified. 'Inappropriate jokes, young people who are horny.'

In the early afternoon the area coordinator, Sharleen, who was introduced at the graduation ceremony, sat down for a meeting with Chelsea in the training space. The youth workers and I could see this meeting taking place from the team office. After this meeting the two youth workers were invited to the training space to talk with Sharleen. One of the

volunteers on the program, Lorna, and I sat in the offices and watched this meeting from the office

Lorna told me about what to expect for the upcoming program. It is, she said, ‘nerve wracking at the beginning because no one knows each other.’ She told me about one of the games that the group plays. It is called ‘two truths and a lie’. The player has to make three statements to the group, two of which are true and one lie. The group then interrogates the player before arriving at a decision. Other members of the group have to ‘judge you’, she said, albeit without ‘knowing you’.

In the coming weeks we will come to play other games. One involved the group of trainees being asked to take as many pieces of kitchen roll as they wished. Once the group had taken these pieces, the youth workers announced that the trainee had to tell the group one ‘truth’ for every piece taken. Further along on the program we will do an exercise about ‘first impressions’. One involved selecting ‘who you would sit next to on a bus’. Trainees were asked to place post-it notes next to one of the set of pictures placed on the floor. The pictures were grainy, though some recognisably depicted celebrities. After the trainees had picked their preferred passenger, the youth worker observed that no-one had picked the man with lots of tattoos. He is, one of the youth workers tells us, a millionaire but because his appearance, no one wanted to sit next to him. We are asked to guess how long it takes to make a hiring decision during a job interview. The right answer is that the decision is made when the interview candidate arrives at reception. The receptionist, we are told, and has the power to make this decision. They do so based upon the fifteen seconds it takes the interviewee to introduce themselves. This decision is conveyed when calling to tell the interviewer that the candidate has arrived.

Lorna is sitting at the side of the office. She phones potential trainees and asks if they are still planning to visit. I look through the NEET report that is put together by officers in

the local authority. This is a thirteen-page list of all NEETs in the local authority area. Many names have been colour coded according to whether they have taken the program, are unavailable, are no longer NEET, are uninterested in the program, and so on. Upon returning to the team office after their meeting, Daniel and Kyron were clearly annoyed. Daniel said to Chelsea that she has ‘thrown me under the bus’. What seemed to have transpired is that Chelsea informed Sharleen that she would not be continuing to deliver the careers and employment component of the program. Daniel and Kieron described how Sharleen was trying to gauge if there is ‘any truth’ to the claims made by Chelsea about the manager, Hayley. Sharleen’s questions were, they said, an attempt to corroborate their three accounts. She wanted to see how Daniel and Kieron ‘read the situation’.

During the discussion that followed, the three worked out the details of a shared complaint about Hayley. Chelsea seemed apologetic and rubbed the upper arms of Daniel and Kieron. They talked about why this complaint came out now. Both Daniel and Kieron agree that if they had told the Head of Youth Support Services, that their issues on the program would simply be hidden under some paperwork. They agree that there are problems with the way that the program is being managed. It was preferable that Chelsea tell Sharleen about her complaint. They mention that staff at head office do not know what goes on at the program, especially on residential trips. They then flesh out their complaint about the senior youth worker and program manager, Hayley. First on the list: she had recently turned down an offer of another provider who had offered to deliver the careers and employment services. This complaint carried on: ‘When Hayley goes up to head office she is very professional and “puts on a face”’. There is also some mention by Daniel about the way that Hayley acts around him and the trainees. He wonders if she acts like that because she does not think that he or Kieron want to be “professional”. “But then how can you complain?” He asks. “She’s the manager. What are you going to do? Complain to her about her?”’ (from fieldnotes).

### 5.3 *Recruiting NEETs*

In the five weeks between the end and start of a new program, staff set about deciding who would be in the new cohort of NEET trainees. During this time, which one member of staff reported as being quiet and boring as no young people were around, staff planned for the group's residential trip, decided when to start the program after next, completed record-keeping duties, took meetings at the local authority head offices and with external providers of the English and Maths components of the course, and began recruiting a new group of young people.

An overriding question during this recruitment process involved asking whether the young person should be on the program. This was not done solely in terms of whether young people were technically eligible for the program. Nor was it clear that 'NEETs appear to matter more for what they will become, as opposed to what they are facing in the here and now' (Gillies 2016: 153). And whilst it is evident that the category of NEET can be applied to a diverse group of people, the category has practical cogency in organising employment interventions by providing a background understanding of 'what type of young person' – in terms of background, educational attainment, socioeconomic status, desire to complete the program, levels of social or cultural capital, and so on – should be enrolled in the program (Furlong 2006; Yates and Payne 2006). As the category of NEET is able to give a sense who should be joining the program, further inquiries about a young person's identity were made by staff in reference to the day-to-day running of the traineeship. Impressions and observations were gathered by staff from these inquiries and provided analytic resources for deliberating what it was that staff needed to watch out for specific young people once the program had started.

Although the course was branded as a NEET Traineeship, that did not mean that recruitment onto the course was guaranteed by a young person's status as 'not in education,

employment or training’. This was not the sole criterion that staff members cited when considering who should be let onto the course. Indeed, as staff went about meeting young people to recruit to the program, they mentioned additional characteristics that staff needed to stay alert to. These additional characteristics did not seem to involve selecting trainees according to whether, as per provider guidance framework documents, trainees ‘have little work experience but are strongly motivated by work’ (HoC 2015: 13). Nor was there a clear, single ‘test’ which was used to check that prospective trainees have a ‘reasonable chance of being ready for employment or an apprenticeship’ (DfE/BIS 2015: 6) within six months of completing the course. Nor was the overriding consideration about the ‘target group’ articulated in the following form:

‘We want traineeships to improve the quality of options for young people who are nearly ready to enter an apprenticeship or other sustainable employment and also draw in young people who would not otherwise be in education, employment or training’ (DfE/BIS 2015: 13).

This is not to claim that complying with such specifications were not a consideration for staff. The recruitment process instead involves noticing and orientating to the ways that young people presented themselves to staff. As staff needed to make sense of what each young person wanted from their recruitment on to the traineeship, staff needed to find ways to come to a shared understanding about the identity of each trainee, what they wanted, and how to characterise them as persons.

As one component of this work, staff undertook observations of young people during initial meetings and the first week of activities on the program and described these observations as a way to make sense of the identity of each trainee. This sense making work was a ‘shop floor problem’, as staff noticed, discussed, found out what to ‘watch out for’, told

each other what they had seen, found out more about each young person (on ‘shop floor problems’ see Garfinkel 2002). These observations specified how the trainees, beyond sharing the administrative category of NEET, interacted with staff and other trainees during group activities. These observations allowed for a developing and revisable account that filled out how the under-specified category of NEET should be understood in the case of each trainee. In one sense, as making sure that staff and young people ‘got on’ was a pressing concern, these observations and trainees’ conduct was made relevant to the recruitment of young people as trainees. One staff member explained this point to a young person during an intake meeting.

we’re not just accepting anyone and everyone, the first two days, which you’ve missed yeah, yesterday and today, is a taster day, so now we’re going to sit down with Sharleen and talk about every young person and if we don’t think they’re good enough, they’re not ready for the program, then we’ll tell them to come back another time.

Whilst this does not indicate that the work that staff undertook to recruit new trainees departs from the funding guidelines specifications for traineeships, it does indicate how staff reasoned about the way that telling trainees that recruitment to the program involved distinguishing between those who are and who are not ‘good enough’, those who are and who are ‘not ready for the program’. The quote also indicates that the decision is sequentially ordered to follow on from the ‘first two days’.

During the initial referral meeting that involved registering the young person with the council youth service, and after those ‘taster’, ‘first two days’, staff members collected and presented a set of observations about each of the potential trainees to each other. These observations were mostly shared in discussions in the staff office away from prospective trainees. In order to understand who was recruited to the program, one point of departure

would be to analyse which organisations referred young people to the program (see Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4. 4.5). This would reveal the main referral routes as being through the youth offending service, social workers, the council-funded careers advice service, further education colleges, and self-referrals. This would provide little by way of details about how staff made sense of the young people who had appointments at the offices and what observations they would make relevant. Other considerations were at play in identifying each young person with the program.

This was made sense of through an overriding concern about whether there were ‘red flags’ identified on the referral documents. It also made sense in terms of whether staff would be able to address such ‘red flag’ issues about a young person. The identification of ‘red flags’ could be understood as providing a clue about how at members of staff talked about ‘risks’ that individual trainees may pose, and how safeguarding checks would need to be conducted on the basis that these trainees were admitted to the program. Two questions were in play when thinking through these concerns: Would these issues prevent them from completing the program? Would these issues prevent other participations from completing the program?

These questions were not covert considerations for staff members, but were overtly raised by young people and other interested parties. Aimee, a potential trainee visited the offices accompanied by a social worker. Aimee had started but not completed the previous program and expressed concern that people she became friends with tended not to be a ‘good option’. The social worker and staff proposed a solution about how to deal with ‘dodgy people’ that she might encounter on the program. The social worker suggested that staff

Ethnicity / Cultural Identity (Allow the young person to dictate their own ethnicity)			
<b>White</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Other Ethnic Background</b>
British	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Another white background	<input type="checkbox"/>	Turkish	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Any other ethnic background	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Black</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Asian</b>
British	<input type="checkbox"/>	British	<input type="checkbox"/>
African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other black background	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Any other Asian background	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Mixed Ethnic Background</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	White & Black African
White & Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	White & Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
White & Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other mixed ethnic background	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reason for referral or Current situation			
Risk of Offending	<input type="checkbox"/>	Young Offender	<input type="checkbox"/>
Young Parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anger Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confidence / Motivation / Self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mental Health Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal Relationship / Family Problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Victim of Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>
Young Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substance Misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Immigration Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaving Care / Looked After Child	<input type="checkbox"/>	Socially Excluded	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Educational Needs (SEN)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
NEET (not in education training or employment)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Please Provide Brief Details \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Details of Previous Situation
<input type="checkbox"/> In School / College
<input type="checkbox"/> Dropped out of School/ College
<input type="checkbox"/> Part Time Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship
<input type="checkbox"/> Long term out of school
<input type="checkbox"/> Currently under Job centre
<input type="checkbox"/> Moved into area (NEET)
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent or Career
<input type="checkbox"/> Under YOS or Probation

LYS – NEET Referral Form Document October 2013

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*Figure 5.1: 'Reasons for referral or Current Situation'. The second page (of four) from the 'NEET Referral' form used by traineeship staff.*



would oversee who Aimee became friends with. ‘Well that’s something to keep tabs on, and an eye and review with Aimee, maybe weekly.’ The staff member commented that such a concern could be accommodated. ‘If I see something that looks a bit dodgy, I’d be like, “Aimee, just keep an eye on this one” you know what I’m saying. We can do that here as well.’ This also accompanied staff handing out advice: ‘or the other option... is just to have a bit of a guard, you know, not everybody is going to be grateful, not everyone is going to like you, not everybody, people are going to stab you in the back and there are dodgy people in life, there’s always one person.’

Each trainee was thereby considered in relation to how they raised concerns about completing the program and their identifiable conduct in the way that they each trainee interacted with staff and others trainees. In order to do this, staff needed to share their insights and observations about what they should be aware of in the case of each trainee. When meeting young people who were not known to the staff, the staff members were able to draw from a variety of sources in order to build a picture about how each of the trainees would do on the program. This comprised the youth workers knowledge of social structures, public and educational service provision, reference to ‘youth culture’, using referral documents, asking questions from standard ‘intake questionnaires’, and other sources.

For some of the prospective trainees, staff received referral documents which included case notes taken from their contact with social workers, child protection services, foster carers, police, and youth offending services. These notes were read according to staff members’ knowledge about the organisational context in which they were written (Emerson 1991). Given their understanding of how other social welfare professionals would write these documents, comments which were identified as ‘red flags’ could be accommodated into pre-existing interpretive frameworks or may require making further inquiries by contacting colleagues. Though the comments on referral documents described historical events, staff

made these notes intelligible by indicating what concerns would need to be allayed if these young people joined the program. In this way, knowing how to read referral documents required being able to decide whether what was written on administrative forms may not be what had actually occurred. For example, a comment on one referral document that stated that a young person had been caught in possession of class A drugs could be quickly explained. One staff member offered an explanation by suggesting that the young person ‘might have said it just to not get charged’ for being a ‘worker’. In turn this implied the possibility that the young person had done this due to having, what the youth worker called, ‘weed debts’. In this example we see how youth workers display their knowledge about how young people interacted with official agencies and dealt with their interactions with these agencies. This knowledge of drug markets, as Waverly Duck (2015) has shown, how the residents and marginalized populations in inner city neighbourhoods, are structured through familiar sense making practices and orders of interaction. A young person declaring themselves to be in possession of drugs instead of being a ‘worker’ reduces the possibility of criminal sentence and result in such a ‘record’ that could be interpreted by youth workers.

If explanations were not readily available, staff sought to settle ‘red flag’ issues by following up with professionals, parents, or carers who were mentioned on referral documents. This may mean contacting staff at these ‘referral’ organisations so as to find out more details about any concerning comments. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it youth service staff’s competency in understanding other public service agencies could be used to revisit key notions in ‘inter-agency’ theory. Staff are able to draw from their knowledge of social welfare organisations, training providers, local authority teams, educational provision, in terms of their shared understanding of organisational practices and ‘cultures’, in order to work with young people. As Will Mason (2015: 65-68) has indicated in research on youth services, youth workers and volunteers engage in a variety of ‘partnership

working' activities with social welfare professionals, namely the police officers. In this sense, staff have a working knowledge of other social welfare professionals' practices, being themselves a part of, what Robert Emerson (1991) has called, an 'interlocking sets of social welfare organisations'. Indeed, during my visits, social workers, employability tutors, staff from alternative educational providers would 'pop in' to the offices.

Secondly, staff addressed concerns during meetings with each young person. In these initial 'intake' meetings, staff registered the young person with the council youth service, presented an overview of the components of the training program – what activities, qualifications, and expectations they had – and then invited the young person to attend the first two days of the program. During these meetings, staff members were able to use their interactions to address and reassess their preliminary concerns they had about troubling comments on referral documents in light of observations made during meetings. These meetings provided occasions to generate a new perspective with which to interpret concerns and formulate new accounts about trainees. Depending on these interactions, and how staff interpreted these interactions, staff were able to anticipate how trainees would be likely to conduct themselves if and when recruited on the program. These meetings and sessions allowed for behaviours to be noticed through informal observations. The activities that took place in these sessions provided an inference-rich setting in which to make observations.

The induction days, the ice-breaker sessions, group discussions, rule setting activities, all involved staff leading the group and making 'informal' observations about what young people were like in group situations. These observations were not used to produce specific accounts of what 'values' each trainee should inculcate or what 'abilities' would make them more employable. They were not, so to speak, discussing how to strategically inspire 'aspiration management' amongst working class trainees (Davidson 2011). Instead, by gathering these observations, which would then be articulated to each other, staff members

**Smart Objectives** – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound

Young person's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Commencement \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Purpose statement (Your future plans) \_\_\_\_\_

No.	Focus Area, i.e. housing, employment, education, substance misuse, etc.	Current situation	Goals	Action required	By Who	By When
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

11. Do you currently have a free oyster card? Yes No

12. What are your future plans or career?  
.....

13. Do you understand it is important NOT to bring any alcohol, drugs or weapons to a session? Yes No

14. Do you understand if it is suspected that you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs you, you will not be able to take part in a session. Yes No

15. Do you understand if it is suspected that you have an offensive weapon on you, you will not be able to take part in a session. Yes No

How would you Rate the following?	Excellent	Good	Poor	Unacceptable
Attendance				
Time keeping				
Reliability				
Communication				
Taking responsibility				
Following instructions				
Working with others				
Sticking to tasks				

16. Are you happy for us to contact other agencies which work with you such as youth offending/ probation/ social services?  
Yes No

Young persons Name:.....  
Young persons signature:..... Date:.....

**Public speaking speech**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Something interesting about you \_\_\_\_\_

What do you think of the programme so far?  
.....

What are you hoping to achieve on the programme?  
.....

What have you learnt so far?  
.....

Previous work experience/ qualifications \_\_\_\_\_

What are your Career goals?  
.....

Thank you

**Debriefing Sheet**

Staff taking notes: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Present: \_\_\_\_\_

Were any staffs late for the session?  
Name/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Any Visitors or collaboration work? Yes No

Name/s: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activities**  
.....

**How did the session go?**  
.....

**General Atmosphere?**  
.....

**Any Incidents?**  
.....

Was a CS2 completed for this incident? Yes No

A.O.B  
.....

Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5: Selection of documents used by NEET traineeship staff (clockwise from top left): (2) ‘Smart Objectives’: completed during intake meetings; itemising a trainee’s set of personal objectives; (3) second page of intake questionnaire: the list of questions is used during intake meetings with trainees; (4) daily debriefing sheet: completed at the end of each day by a member of staff; (5) ‘public speaking speech’ used to prepare students during ‘public speaking day’, the prepared speech is supposed to be used at the graduation event.

worked to come to an understanding about each of the trainees. This work involved providing an ongoing, developing, and revisable account about the trainee's participation in the course of activities. The remainder of this section provides five examples of how other staff work over the course of these initial days to make sense of a program relevant identity for each trainee, and how staff should orientate themselves towards that trainee.

*First trainee:* The referral documents for this trainee were considerably longer than for others. The senior youth worker identified a 'red flag' issue that needed attention. When I looked through the referral documents prior to the trainee's first meeting with staff, I asked which of the comments stood out for notice. 'Gets naked,' the staff member replied. This was noted on the referral documents as 'showing private body parts.' One of the staff seemed amused and confused by this. He wanted to know how this could have happened to the trainee without him realising it. As for other comments, 'lashing out' was not considered to be a problem.

After the initial meeting but before the taster days, the staff discussed this trainee with volunteers assisting on the program. One of the volunteers commented: 'If it's the same [person] you're talking about, he's too bad, this guy kicks up a fuss about anything'. He knew someone with the same name and speculated on whether it was the same person.

In building a picture of who the young person is from written and second-hand sources, and then going about observing behaviour, staff were able to revise their accounts given explanations provided in an initial meeting. At this first meeting, the trainee explained that the incident where he was caught with a knife was a mistake. He had found it walking home, and it had happened over five years ago when he had been eleven years old.

One of the staff noted the disjuncture between what had been written on referral documents and what was observed about the young person after the first two days. One of the

staff members remarked: 'He shocked me... I ain't going to lie to you, he shocked me... If I saw [him] first for those two days and then I saw his risk assessment, I'd be like, you're lying... you listen to him yeah, he's a good boy like...' Staff also remarked that this trainee knew one of the other trainees because both had contact with an organisation that worked with young people in care.

*Second trainee:* At the initial meeting, staff worked through a set of questions from the intake questionnaire on the registration form and asked why he wanted to do the course (see Figure 4.3). The trainee said that he had to be there as he was a court order from the Youth Offending Service. The senior youth worker remarked that he was 'lucky then because this is a fun course compared with others'.

As part of the standard set of questions on the intake questionnaire, the staff read out a list of terms against which the trainee was asked to assess himself. The senior youth worker gave the rationale as to why they were asking these questions. It was, he said, to 'see where you are at right now and see how the course improves them'. (Although this 'tracking' was intended for these records, in reality they were hardly used by the staff to monitor 'soft outcomes'. The local authority office responsible for record-keeping admitted difficulty in getting 'buy in' for using this measurement tool.) For the terms, the trainee was invited to choose between Excellent, Good, Poor or Unacceptable: for *Following Instructions*, he said 'between good and poor'; for *Working with Others*, he said 'same place'; for *Keeping to Task*, he said 'yeah I'm good at that'.

After the initial meeting had finished and the staff and volunteers began to discuss him, one of the volunteers remarked 'he's going to be a little bastard'. The senior youth worker responded that he 'looks like a trouble maker, proper cockney' and that it is likely that he does 'not see a lot of black people in Slough'. This account indicated how a trainee's background characteristics are treated as having implications for his participation on the

course. In doing so, it required indicating that, given the trainee having previously gone to school and lived in Slough, they lack a set of relevant experiences with minority ethnic populations.

The comment also indicates that there are likely to be interactional matters arising due to the trainee ‘not seeing a lot of black people’ when living in Slough. A week later, after the first two days of sessions, the staff sat around discussing this same trainee.

KIERON: I ain’t gonna lie, I like Kevin, but  
LORNA: Kevin, Kevin’s a bit like, he’s a bit like  
KIERON: He just turns around and said ‘yeah I’m white’  
LORNA: He moves a bit nuts you know, you watch the way he, he moves  
KIERON: I do like him though

*Third trainee:* Staff also drew upon knowledge of a trainee’s ‘background’ to formulate an interpretation of their observed conduct. In this sense, staff members used their knowledge about a young person to indicate what caused their observed behaviour that was treated as problematic. For the third trainee, there was some disagreement between staff about what aspects of the trainee’s biographic details were consequential. After the two days of initial meetings, a youth worker and volunteer discussed their observations about interactions between the third trainee and other members of the group. One of the volunteers suggest that, just as a former trainee had ‘improved’ their spoken English whilst on the program, so too would the third trainee. ‘He might start talking a bit better,’ they suggested. The youth worker disagreed: ‘No, that’s him, that’s [the third trainee], he’s been here since he was eight, that’s him.’ Turning now to discuss what the trainee had said to another member of the group: ‘Do you know what it is yeah, he’s not, he don’t know how England is’. Again, the youth worker disagreed. ‘No it’s nothing because of England, it’s nothing to do with England, it’s about his upbringing’.

*Fourth trainee:* The fourth trainee's conduct during the initial meeting prompted an assessment of the way that she comported her body, not having eye contact with staff, pulling her jacket up over her face. One of the youth workers declared that 'she is less responsive to men' and that 'we're going to have to tackle that'. In formulating a way to accomplish 'tackling that', it was suggested that one of the female volunteers would 'buddy up' with her. Another youth worker indicated that he was 'not worried about her' and that he was sure that once the group had 'built trust with her I bet she'll be loud'. After the initial two days of meetings, the same youth worker started to revise the account about her 'only problem' after watching her interactions with the group.

KIERON:       The only problem I can see her having was, you may have not heard, she makes little comments when people will say something stupid

LORNA:        Yeah she starts laughing

KIERON:        She's rude you know

To exemplify this, Kieron added:

When Kevin said something, she was just like, she muttered something, I can't remember what it was, but it was rude

*Some other trainees:* During the taster days and before the start of the new program, trainees from the previous iteration of the program visited the offices to pick up certificates or to check in with staff. One of the volunteers worked their way down a list of these trainees in an effort to find out whether trainees had completed their 100 required hours of work experience. One of youth workers instructed a volunteer to tell the trainees to approach



charity shops so as to make up the remaining hours for the program. The youth worker reasoned that charity shops were often looking for volunteers.

On one of the induction days, one of these trainees from the former program turned up, seemingly to apologise. The senior youth work asked him what had happened to him since none of the staff had seen him 'since residential', two months prior. It seemed that he did not complete his work experience placement. He gave an account that involved the trainee seeing his father, who had somehow got his mobile phone number. He had seen his father sitting in a car near his house, and then received multiple phone calls from him. He had tried to block his father's phone to prevent these calls but his father began calling from different numbers. He had spoken to the police who had told him that nothing could be done. Since then he had seen his father's car driving past his home. He explained that 'I am disappointed in myself' for not completing the work experience. One of the staff offered advice:

you can't let other things determine your life, you're going to go through so many ups and downs, I've been through exactly what you've been through... so what I did was put on a different face... if you let everything else win and let that dictate your life. You've got to put yourself in a situation where you can't act up. How is Chelsea to know? It's all about managing everything and that's a hard skill. The best thing is to have a professional face, and in your room, an emotional face.

Although job-seeking manuals and official leaflets from social welfare offices provide a guide to what to be aware of in relation to finding employment (Boland 2015a, 2015b), the way that actual advice is given to this trainee is not located in the framework guideline issues to traineeship providers. Instead, staff members reflexively orientate to trainees' accounts, their expectations of the conduct of the trainee on the program, common-sense

understandings and empathetic expressions that distinguish between ‘professional’ and ‘emotional’ faces.

In working out how this group of trainees would cohere during the course of the program, staff also advised me, as a researcher and volunteer, about how to conduct myself as a member of the group. As a researcher who was registered as a volunteer with the council youth service, the advice I received was guided towards being a member of staff. I was advised that I would find my role within the group. I should also not be too quiet and simply sit in the back of sessions. If I did so I would not be getting the most out of my time with the program.

This work to define roles was extended to other members of staff. According to the youth workers, each member of staff has a role to play. These roles, as they described them, demarcated the staff as members of a family. In describing themselves, the senior youth worker was an ‘older sister’, one of the youth workers was an ‘older brother and fun’, and another youth worker as an ‘older brother but more serious’, the employability tutor was ‘ditzy’.

Given this framework, I was told ‘the most important thing is to be yourself.’ This comment was perhaps meant to reassure, offer guidance about how to present myself and discount attempts to be ‘contrived’. It also could be treated as a maxim for crafting a personality that suitably displays the ‘soft skills’, aesthetic and emotional labour requirement for employment (Nixon 2009; Pettinger 2004). As Ashley Mears writes in discussing the way that fashion models are required to become a ‘self’: ‘Not just any personality or energy will do; it must be appropriate *and* authentic’ (Mears 2011: 112. See also pp. 106-115). The following day staff compared notes about people that they believed I resembled: ‘a tanned version of my brother’; the football player, Dani Alves; and ‘my barber’.

There were some other expectations about the conduct of volunteers, pointed out by one of the youth workers. When discussing another volunteer who wanted to carry on with the next program, the senior youth worker expressed annoyance with her. She explained that the volunteer had been caught drinking with the young people on the last residential trip. The youth worker did not want to get into trouble due to the volunteer's actions, the youth worker said that she had worked hard to get the job and such activities could jeopardise that position. In these ways the work that members of the youth service undertake is not limited to assessments about the 'work ethic' of NEET trainees. Staff are not observing their conduct with the view of comparing it to an abstract ideal of 'hard working' or demonstrating good 'work ethic'. Indeed, contrary to Andrew Dunn's (2010, 2013, 2015) argument about 'activation workers' views on unemployed people's 'work ethic' and 'choosiness', this chapter has shown how staff need to attend to organisational requirements to account for their own and NEET trainees' conduct in terms that exceed a narrow focus on a 'work ethic'.

In this way staff make use of sense-making methods to account for NEET trainees through their repeated, ongoing contact and settings in which they observe and describe their conduct. This method structures their observations by reflexively constituting the organisationally-relevant identity, or 'participation', of young people through answering: how does this young person 'fit in' with other trainees during activities? How do they conduct themselves in interactions with other trainees? How do their observed behaviours differ from what is noted in their case file records? How do trainees differ from observations made during initial meetings to when they are put into a group with other young people? Is it possible to give an alternate account of 'red flag' issues raised upon reviewing paperwork and in initial meetings? How do young people conduct themselves with staff? How do young people answer questions drawn from standard forms administered in the intake meetings? How does the young person express a desire to join and complete the program? What is the

relevance of the ‘background’ – either where a young person ‘grew up’, location of residence, ethnic or gender identity – to their observed conduct? Can this young person be reasonably expected to change problematic conduct in the course of the 10 week program? Will the young person contribute to ‘making a team’? Do other members of staff agree with this assessment of the young person?

#### 5.4 *Conclusion*

The chapter has focused on an aspect of youth workers’ practice whilst delivering a NEET traineeship program. This involved looking at routine sense-making practices used by staff members and how these descriptions made sense of the *participation* of program participants. To this extent these descriptions constitute an element of intervention work that goes unremarked upon in studies which examine the outcomes of training programs. This sense-making work is focused upon the management of activities and how participants will figure within those activities. The chapter has shown how a group of four youth workers and volunteers make use of this common-sense reasoning and professional skills to organise the day to day running of this program. These skills were used to read referral reports and use common-sense understanding to compare the accounts made in these reports with what they observed of the new group of trainees. This is not an activity that can be located through the collection of administrative documents produced by staff both in and out of the office.

The chapter suggested some occasions whereby this observation and descriptive work was put on display. It picked explicated three such ordinary activities in which participation was treated as a relevant category by staff: a graduation ceremony; the last day of partnership with an employability tutor; the intake and taster day sessions for a new cohort of NEET trainees. Each of these activities provided materials with which to respecify how intervention

work involves the management of ordinary activities which are largely left out of sociological or social policy accounts about the organisation of youth transitions. There may be good reason for this, as accounting for a trainee's participation is a topic undergoing ongoing revision and attention by youth workers. In attempting to describe how youth workers and social welfare professionals practice is constituted through practical tasks and in talk, the chapter has also attempted to show how an ethnomethodological approach can seek to specify the tacit frameworks that professionals use to conduct admission processes and monitor program participation.

The following chapter offers a contrasting take on the topic of how *participation* is orientated towards in the context of working on 'NEET to EET' transitions. As this chapter has focused on the way that participation is treated as an ongoing topic of attention which requires narrating observations and storied descriptions made from observations, the next chapter looks at the procedures through which the topic of participation is treated as a statistical object. Although the present chapter takes up the topic of participation through examining the description practices through which youth workers manage the day to day operations of a NEET intervention, a program which involved intensively working with young people each day over the course of weeks, this work of collecting data goes on largely behind the scenes in the offices of local authority youth service by teams of data officers who fulfil a statutory duty in partnership with the Department for Education. It is there that staff attend to maintaining and updating management information systems in order to produce reportable *participation data* about sixteen to nineteen-year olds.

## SIX.            The Routine Grounds of Participation Data

As in the previous analytic chapter, our focus takes us back to the topic of *participation* as it relates to the transitions of NEETs and young people. We do this by seeking to locate how this is organised in the professional work practices that routinely attend to these transitions. In this way, we focus on the production of one object which is used to account for these transitions, namely *participation data*. The chapter describes some of the practices used to make sense of this data and how these practices configure the relation between intervention work and NEET groups. The chapter describes fieldwork with local authority youth service staff and other professionals responsible for collecting and returning management information to the Department for Education (DfE), we describe the work of youth workers and data officers in local authorities who refer to the process of gathering the participation status of the ‘reportable cohorts’ for ‘data returns’. This involves accounting for young people according to whether they are in school, college, NEET, and so on. This chapter addresses intervention work as it relates to the collection and centralisation of information about the total population of young people, the so-called ‘reportable cohort’, covered by the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) provision in the Education and Skills Act 2008. This legislation requires that local authorities produce data returns and ‘encourage’ young people into some recognised form of education or training up until the age of nineteen. The chapter takes up this topic by addressing the kinds of routine activities that staff undertake to work on

collecting this information in order to produce ‘data returns’, and the kinds of troubles they associate with organising this work.

This chapter draws on documents, fieldwork and interviews conducted with practitioners in different local authorities across Greater London. As the chapters draws from different sites to describe how staff collect, return, report on, discuss and make sense of this participation data, the chapter aims to contribute further to our developing understanding how intervention work is coordinated through the routine regulation of reporting requirements. This builds on a theme in the previous two chapters which have provided examples of the way that practitioners use documentary records in routine work practices. As the implementation of the Raising of the Participation Age duty by local authorities is principally evidenced through the participation data that local authorities produce, it is necessary to understand how this data is recorded and presented as a reportable object for examination within institutional settings. The chapter aims to describe the ordinary activities through which such data is constituted as a relevant and accountable object produced through practitioners’ work tasks. This includes both recording and commenting upon such data. To present this analysis I draw on field notes, more detailed transcripts of interviews and sequences of talk in meetings, as well as secondary documents to show how problems with this participation data are routinely described and encountered in making sense of how this data is produced and analysed. By doing so I aim to answer the following questions: how do local authority staff describe their practices of collecting and reporting participation data? How do members orientate to participation data as a routine aspect of their work tasks? What accounts do members give about the relevance of participation data in specific settings? How do members describe troubles associated with collecting, returning, reporting and interpreting participation data about NEETs?

The chapter is divided into six sections, each offering a discrete setting in which professionals display how they make sense of participation data. The chapter starts off with a brief introduction of sociological and ethnomethodological studies of statistical practice and introduces the notion that the social organisation of statistics tradition can be used to examine the production of data, and thereby examine the interactional work through which data is treated as an ‘institutional product’. We then move offer details about the organisation of interactions between youth service staff and clients as they relate to how they collect this data through ‘tracking and monitoring’. The chapter then presents how a data officer administers record-keeping software by running through database records and showing how interventions are required to be recorded. The last section describes how statistical categories of NEET and ‘Activity Not Known’ are discussed during the regular presentation of Participation Reports delivered at meetings of a membership organisation for local authorities that will be the main focus of Chapter Seven.

### *6.1 Data as ‘institutional product’*

The chapter treats this topic as a perspicuous setting with which to investigate practices through which administrative data and statistics about NEET participation is constituted in different organisational settings. (The title of the chapter refers to Harold Garfinkel’s 1964 article by Harold Garfinkel, ‘Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities’). The chapter takes up the notion of ‘routine grounds’ to draw together a set of examples of the ways in which members orientate to ‘participation data’ as a feature within workplace settings. The practices through which members make sense of participation data is through talk and conduct. In short, members’ talk and conduct orientates to the occasioned relevance of participation data as, what Maynard and Clayman call, ‘institutional products’ (1991). The chapter does not propose to offer a model that explains a generalised relationship between



data, information and statistics. Instead, the chapter explicates the practices and troubles through which local authority youth service staff account for producing this data, how these practices are embedded within expectations of following guidelines for producing records of activities within organisational settings, how guidelines are used to record information about the ‘reportable cohort’, and how the information and statistics produced from these records are treated in reports about the implementation of the RPA duty. This concerns a broader population group than that which is covered in the collection of unemployment, or NEET, statistics (O’Brien and Griffin 2015). This also takes place as policy reports have indicated that NEET statistics have ‘broken down’. Richard Brooks has indicated that there are systematic issues in the reporting of NEET statistics which ‘means that the many “missing NEETS” do not get the help and support they so badly need’ (2014, xv-xvi). Indeed, as local authority staff have a statutory responsibility to collect and return data on the total ‘reportable cohort’, it provides an interesting case that has been previously unexamined in sociological literatures on youth or NEET groups.

The case study therefore describes the intervention work involved in reporting this data and the record-keeping practices that are used to account for population cohorts in relation to national legislation. The chapter aims to address two questions: how do local authority staff describe their practices of collecting and reporting management information? How do members orientate to participation data treated as a part of routine workplace activities? What accounts do members give about the relevance of participation data in specific settings? How do members describe troubles encountered with participation data? The chapter does this by describing how ‘information’ is a locally accomplished practical activity (Watson and Carlin 2012). That means that the chapter aims to describe the situated practices that members of local authorities use to provide intelligible records about a ‘reportable cohort’ and how those records, and the statistical information produced from

those records, feature as organisationally relevant facts. In one sense, this involve the maintenance of, in Geoffrey Bowker's (2010) terms, 'information infrastructures'. For this chapter, these technical infrastructures are the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS) and London Client Caseload Information System (LCCIS). Local authority staff use these information systems to collect and return management information, or 'participation data', about the 'reportable cohort' of young people in order to implement the RPA duty.

Local authority staff are required to routinely produce management information and submit these 'data returns' to the Department for Education in order to monitor the implementation of the RPA duty. This duty raising the age at which young people are required to be participating in some form of education, employment or training. National legislation passed in Education and Skills Act 2008 which required raising the age at which young people in are required to be in education or training, changing the age from sixteen to eighteen years old (Day *et al* 2012; Lambert *et al* 2015; Maguire 2013; Simmons 2008; Woodin *et al* 2012). This legislation was brought into effect in two main phases, raising the participation age up to the age of seventeen by 2013, and up to the age of eighteen by 2015. The changes to the definition of 'participation' did not necessarily require young people to attend school. It did not, in short, raising the school leaving age. Instead, young people are counted as 'participating' through either full-time education; work-based learning; traineeships; apprenticeships; or employment alongside a part-time education courses. The chapter will describe the work that local authority staff undertake to prepare management information for submitting 'data returns' on a monthly basis to the Department for Education (DfE). These data returns provide information for assessing the implementation of that duty. They are also used to produce statistical summaries and information for use in other DfE publications, such as Annual Activity Surveys.

The chapter turns to this topic by following Joel Best's (2012: 24) claim that 'all official statistics are products – and often by-products – of decisions by various officials: not just coroners, but also the humble clerks who fill out and file forms, the exalted supervisors who prepare summary reports, and so on'. Indeed, products and by-products are made through those a variety of practices, not limited to analyses of rhetorical practices of using statistics for persuasion (Gephart 1988). These practices are undertaken in a variety of settings and by diverse groups of practitioners. Gregory Downey (2014) has described how the variety of activities involved in working with new technologies and media industries have led to the creation of new forms of 'information labour'. Downey offers case studies of telegraph messenger boys, library technical workers and real-time stenographers, and describes the necessity of considering the movement and circulation of labour in information infrastructures (on librarian's 'information' classification work, see also Watson and Carlin 2012). And whilst such an approach expands upon an approach to statistics in historical surveys of a 'quantification' of rationality and public reason (Desrosieres 2011, 2015; Porter 2011). Studies of information, quantification and statistics tend to miss the interactional details in favour of explaining the macro-historical shifts that occur as a result of new methods information gathering systems. In other accounts, researchers have sought to describe the relation between surveying and information gathering practices to the emergence and standardisation of civil registration systems (Higgs 2004), national censuses (Campbell-Kelly 1996; Emigh *et al* 2016), international 'barometer' surveys (Law 2009), or door-to-door surveys (Peneff 1988). This chapter looks to address this gap in the literature through an ethnomethodological study of statistical work that describes how 'participation data', or management information and statistics, are constituted through the practical work of members of institutional settings. In this way, the chapter offers a contribution to such a corpus of research through studying how statistics and 'participation data', in Maynard and

Clayman's term, are 'institutional products' which 'reflect the interpretive work of professionals in the field, who assemble the particulars of any case according to their typifications of people, motives, and situations' (1991: 406). These products are encountered in the concrete, routine, practical skill required to account for people, instances, events which are reported, and thereby counted, in official statistics. These products are also observable part of the setting in which they are produced. This approach indicates that sociological studies of statistics should identify how the 'interpretive work' of members of institutions is conducted so as to identify whether people, instances, events should be counted in each and every case, and how that is treated as consequential form the settings, for one, in which statistics are produced. For instance, David Sudnow's *Passing On*, an ethnographic account about how hospital staff members' practice treat death as a social fact, has an extended section on 'counting deaths' (1967: 36-42). Sudnow describes how staff members' routine counting practices involve the way that they show their understanding of a structure of activities within the hospital. In all of this staff have a shared practice for counting deaths; counting the number of operations a nurse has witnessed, counting special varieties of deaths, and so on. The chapter also builds upon approaches to statistics that set out to describe how statistical accounts are produced in context. As Albert J. Meehan (2000: 364) writes, statistics 'are a direct indicator of the organization's priorities, that is, of its context of accountability and how its members orient to and develop competencies to produce "facts" that are relevant within this context'. The chapter thereby contributes to debates about how the collection of participation data relates to members competencies and routine work practices. The cohort description in this chapter is reported upon by local authority staff who work to meet a statutory requirement to provide specified set of information to the Department for Education. This cohort is also reported upon through routine interactions and bureaucratic events. This leads to a concern with describe how participation data is produced that

addresses, as Melinda Baccus writes, ‘the problem of constituting social objects and the practices in analytic social theorizing which constitute them as real-worldly social objects’ (1986: 5).

The chapter is divided into five sections, each focusing on describing situated practices used to produce and make sense of participation data in specific settings. The chapter starts off by offering details about the organisation of interactions between youth service staff and clients as they relate to the collection of records through ‘tracking and monitoring’. The chapter then offers a description of how a data officer administers record-keeping software by running through database records and showing how interventions are recorded. The last section describes how statistical categories of NEET and ‘Activity Not Known’ are discussed during the presentation of Participation Reports. These reports were delivered at meetings of a membership organisation for local authorities that will be the main focus of Chapter Seven.

### *6.1 ‘We’re well over ninety percent’*

In the spring of 2016, I went to a careers fair with the group of trainees from the previous chapter. We drove there in a minivan after cutting short a CV session held at the centre. We arrived at a fair held in a large hall on a university campus, towards the end of the day when some exhibitors were beginning to pack up their stands. People representing training agencies, sixth form colleges, apprenticeship providers and careers specialist were spread around the hall were. They had set up tables and posters. Some were talking to young people in uniforms. I was greeted by Emily, a member of staff who I had interviewed a couple of months earlier. She was the manager of the management information unit for the local authority’s youth service and I had interviewed her about tracking, monitoring and the

collection of management information. She and her colleague had told me about late nights they spend inputting and checking data on the system. She had talked me through some of the procedures used to collect and return participation data.

We stood by the entranceway to the hall. Around us were tables, behind which were roll-up banners which advertised training and educational initiatives. There were careers guidance programs, employability workshops, local further education colleges, sixth form courses and other training schemes on show, as well as apprenticeship opportunities at the council. I asked Emily how things had been going since we last met. She seemed to determine that my question was asking about the numbers of people who had been accounted for in the borough's tracking work. 'We're well over ninety percent,' she told me. That is, over ninety percent were 'participating'. That was higher than the London average, she told me, and higher than both their geographical and statistical neighbours. I had not known that that was what my question sought before Emily had answered.

I had to learn to hear what my question was asking about. Both in terms of what I would be understood as asking and how the question should be answered, given who was asking and answering the question. This question was not ironic, but was one to be treated as a serious matter, answerable with reference to the latest statistical summary that she and her management information team had produced. The question of 'how things were going' would be answered in reference to comparisons against 'statistical neighbours', that is, boroughs which the Department for Education listed as having similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics. These figures could be cited and made relevant in a passing conversation at a careers fair as a way to account for 'how things were going'. They provided a resource with which to define what my question was asking. It gave meaning to a possibly trivial inquiry. The form of such a question has been described by Garfinkel and Sacks (1986) as 'Rose's Gloss'. They write that an utterance is given a definiteness of sense by subsequent

turns of talk. Emily's answer displayed what practices were available to her in making sense of what could have been treated as a trivial inquiry. It gave my inquiry some meaningful basis, a reference with which to describe which 'things' had been 'going'.

When Emily and I had met in the borough offices a couple of months earlier, she had told me about what she and other staff did to collect information about the cohort. This information was collected and returned through an online database system called the National Client Caseload Information System, or NCCIS. This was supported by another system used by the London local authorities called the London Client Caseload Information System, or LCCIS. The latter had about half a million records and could be used to search for anyone who was not showing up in databases and on their local records. I was told about other procedures that staff, both youth service and local authority staff, are asked to comply with when inputting information on the systems. I was shown how to interface with the software, told about how to record and transfer this data in line with the Department for Education's specified standards for 'data returns'. Each member of the age cohort in the area had their own entry on the system. Each member had to be accounted for over the course of the year by local authority staff. That there was 'over ninety percent' in participation was a reportable fact. It was a number that reflected the competency of Emily and her colleagues. The fact that the tracking team and other staff ensure that the cohort has been counted could be 'put on display' by citing the statistical figure (Mair, Greiffenhagen and Sharrock 2016).

A few months later I visited the local authority officers, where I could see Emily from a distance. I was meeting with one of Emily's colleagues, Sarah, to talk about keeping records for the NEET program discussed in the previous chapter. Sarah had a Guardian newspaper 'live feed' of the Autumn Budget up on her computer screen. She told me that in a strange way she was relieved that the youth service was planning on outsourcing their non-

statutory services as these budget statements and cost saving announcements would be less consequential.

## *6.2 Monthly review meetings*

I arrived at the local authority offices and was met at the ground floor lobby by Nigel, a manager in a London youth service. We had met a couple of weeks previously when both of us had attended a London Councils Operation Sub-Group meeting of local authority officers. I had asked him whether he could tell me about the phenomena of ‘not knowns’ in the reporting of the Raising of the Participation Age. He agreed to meet to discuss this and invited me to his offices. He walked me through the building, up a couple of staircases, past a ‘hot desk’ area, and through to a windowless, corner office where three other people were sitting around a table. After brief introductions, handshakes and a summary about what I was researching, I asked if I could record the conversation. One of the other visitors remarked that she would watch what she said and hold back from swearing.

I had joined this monthly meeting between two members of a local authority youth service team and two members of a partner organisation who managed their management information. A set of documents were laid out on the table in front of the group. These documents seemed to have been brought, some, perhaps sent in advance, by the management information suppliers. They depicted the local authority’s outreach workers and their caseloads, on pie charts, graphs, and data tables. Nigel had brought me copy of the ‘last NEET report’. Although the statistics on the report should not be used as ‘the figure is all over the place at the moment, because we haven’t finalised them.’

Before too long, one of the M.I. team began offering advice about what I should be looking for and what I would see when researching a category of young people, ‘Activity Not



Knowns'. He began, 'And so, if you look across the piece, what you'll find is that Not Knowns is the increasing challenge. Not Knowns is for many, many, many, many, many local authorities, higher than NEET. And if you look at the data that's published, you'll see it's the year fourteens that's the particular issue'. Not too long after this, Nigel offered a story about what the local authority's Heads of Services proposed to do about the 'increasing challenge' and the 'particular issue' of Not Knowns. This followed on from stating that there are one hundred and forty NEET young people who are 'aged year twelve to fourteen', and about six hundred and fifty Not Knowns who were the same age. To clarify, these Not Knowns are young people for whom the local authority did not have information about their current 'participation statuses'. This group represents a collection of 'missing data', so to speak. For the local authority youth service staff, their statutory duty to report management information meant that these members of the cohort are classified as 'Activity Not Known'. What staff needed to determine: were these young people enrolled in an educational course, either inside or outside the borough? Were they employed? Nigel began to account for this group.

'We have a meeting about six months ago, to talk about the whole thing about data because they were fearful, that it still hasn't come, big Ofsted safeguarding inspection. And obviously the story is, okay, you've got six fifty Not Knowns, what's the story behind those young people? And the big part of it is, actually, the lion share of them, sixty, seventy percent of them, actually didn't attend education in [this borough]. They're [our] residents, but they've never attended [one of our borough's] institutions. So, anecdotally, we know that a lot of them are probably in higher education'

Why would these members of the cohort be counted as Not Known due to the fact that 'they've never attended' educational institutions within the borough? Why would this count

as a valid explanation for the six hundred and fifty Activity Not Knowns? What is the logical structure of that explanation?

An explanation is hinted at from Nigel's account that brings up a set of related 'stories'. He suggests that staff have already made inquiries in order to get the story straight. 'And obviously the story is...' he said. 'What's the story behind those young people?' One story leads to another story. Firstly there is the story about a meeting of Heads of Service occurring 'about six months ago'. Then there is the story, which is actually a requesting of a story within that meeting: 'what is the story behind the Not Knowns'. Then there is the story of how to explain the cause of the levels of Not Knowns.

What does Nigel's 'story behind those young people' rely on to be considered as a credible account? As he says, it is based on anecdotal evidence. Also, I suggest it draws on practical reasoning available to youth service and support staff about 'our cohort'. This reasoning involves, namely, using knowledge of geographically specific facts about the relevant cohort. They already know that 'many' residents do not study at educational institutions within the borough. This point is then offered as a valid premise for generating an explanation for the levels of Not Knowns. This reasoning does not require characterising the Not Known cohort, besides from the fact that these young people are educated in other local authority areas. This group's participation status have not been routinely collected by local authority staff, they have not input details on their databases, as these young people have not appeared on Annual School Censuses or college attendance lists provided to local authority youth service staff. These young people therefore would not have been tracked, nor recorded in management information systems, neither the NCCIS nor the LCCIS, up until statutory age of 'aged year fourteen'. These are some evident premises to Nigel's account.

This account also describes a meeting where the Heads of Service 'were fearful'. The story that Nigel and Heads of Service produces was in anticipation of an impending Ofsted

inspection. In this way, the story also suggests that Heads of Service needed to provide an account over the missing data, the 56 Not Knowns as a rational expectation in light of a ‘big Ofsted inspection’. This inspection became an occasion for an account about where these young people are, and ‘what’s the story behind them?’

In the rest of the meeting, Nigel and his colleagues offer other issues that lie behind the figures. In finding other reasons to explain the story behind the figures, the assembled group suggest possibilities which point to further features that are self-evident to this group; such that students may be travelling to college and therefore do not get picked up in regular reporting; the enormous effort required to get the data uploaded, when considering that there are five hundred Education Funding Agency-funded organisations in Greater London; recent central government policies which have had the effect of displacing people from central London, for instance the impact of changes to the provision of state welfare benefits; that there are no longer any Connexions centres; the closure of a national Connexions service which led to a loss of systematic data collection about local youth service provision and demographic cohorts; the introduction of NEET scorecards which misrepresent NEETs levels, which in turn produces absurd results, where ‘the percentages are a nonsense’; the high numbers of private school students in their cohort; that the Department for Education have never insisted that private schools share information with local authorities their enrolled pupils. Each one of these is another part of an identifiable story, the story that leads to a severe distortion, one of the group claims, in how NEET and Activity Not Known levels are represented.

On this last point, the group explain an observation that, in economically affluent boroughs in London, ‘the cohorts in those boroughs look very weird’. Privately educated members of the cohort do not appear in the School Censuses or college attendance lists, because private schools are not required to share information about their pupils with local

authorities. For the young people who go through private education and live in those areas, one of the group says: ‘in the main, will probably be okay’.

JULIAN: But it’s a guess I suppose  
JAYNE: It’s a guess, but, you know, the majority of people who have been in private education do not end up, you know, in trouble on the streets, NEET, etc., etc., the majority  
NIGEL: Yeah  
JAYNE: I know it happens

Jayne and Nigel seem to agree that their assessment of the cohort suggests that pupils in private educational institutions would not ‘end up... in trouble’ even though they will not be able to account for them. They use two membership categorisation devices, ‘private education’ and ‘NEET’. These provide common-sense resource with which to explain why it is that ‘cohorts in these boroughs look very weird’. There is a comprehensible logic through which Jayne makes that claim: we do not need to be overly concerned about this group who we do not have statistical information about because ‘the majority’ of them are unlikely to become NEET. This logic and knowledge displays why the statistical information need not provide a full picture of the cohort when staff have a working understanding of what the actual circumstances are of the reportable cohort, circumstances that the participation data does not depict. The next section turns to describing how youth service staff use their meetings with young people on their caseload to collect and record information about the current participation status.

### 6.3 *A participation unit*

Yekile, a youth service worker, asked me to wait on the first floor of the offices of a local authority’s ‘participation unit’. Yekile showed me how a weekly meeting with a client was

handled. This meeting was organised to complete a job application for a young person on his caseload. It also required that Yekile record for their meeting as an intervention, demonstrating that he had undertaken a ‘substantial intervention’ with this client. This intervention would be recorded by Yekile on the local authority client caseload information system. The updating of these records would be used to track and monitor the progress of their NEET caseload. I had called Yekile after seeing his name on a poster advertising a CV workshop for NEETs placed in the window of a library. We had agreed to meet at his offices to talk about his work. A couple sat and quietly talked on a sofa at one side of the room. Yekile came back a few minutes later and invited me upstairs to his and three colleagues’ offices. He told me that he has about thirty young people on his ‘primary’ caseload, about seventy on his ‘secondary’. It is ‘good practice’ to contact the primaries once a week, he said. Many of the primaries are not currently in education. He told me that I should note that aspects of the unit’s way of working were modelled on Activity Agreement Pilots. These pilots introduced a new model of working, where youth service staff extended Connexions style provision. As a feature of Yekile and his colleagues’ method of working, this model had to be put into practice in a context of restructuring the national and local provision of Connexions services, reduction in staff in the youth service, and reorganisation of staff in the participation unit (for a couple of other ‘takes’ on contemporary efforts to reorganise local authority youth services and youth work, see Davies 2013; Hughes *et al* 2014; Mason 2015).

Since the reduction of funding for youth services, the end of central government funding for a national Connexions service, changes to the budget and rules for allocating the Educational Maintenance Allowance, Yekile and his team had less opportunities that they are able to on offer through the youth service. He told me about how each further education college seem to have their own way of deciding how to distribute ‘hardship’ payments to students. He said that the ‘EMA was good’. Currently there are different eligibility criteria

# Year 11s At Risk of NEET Process

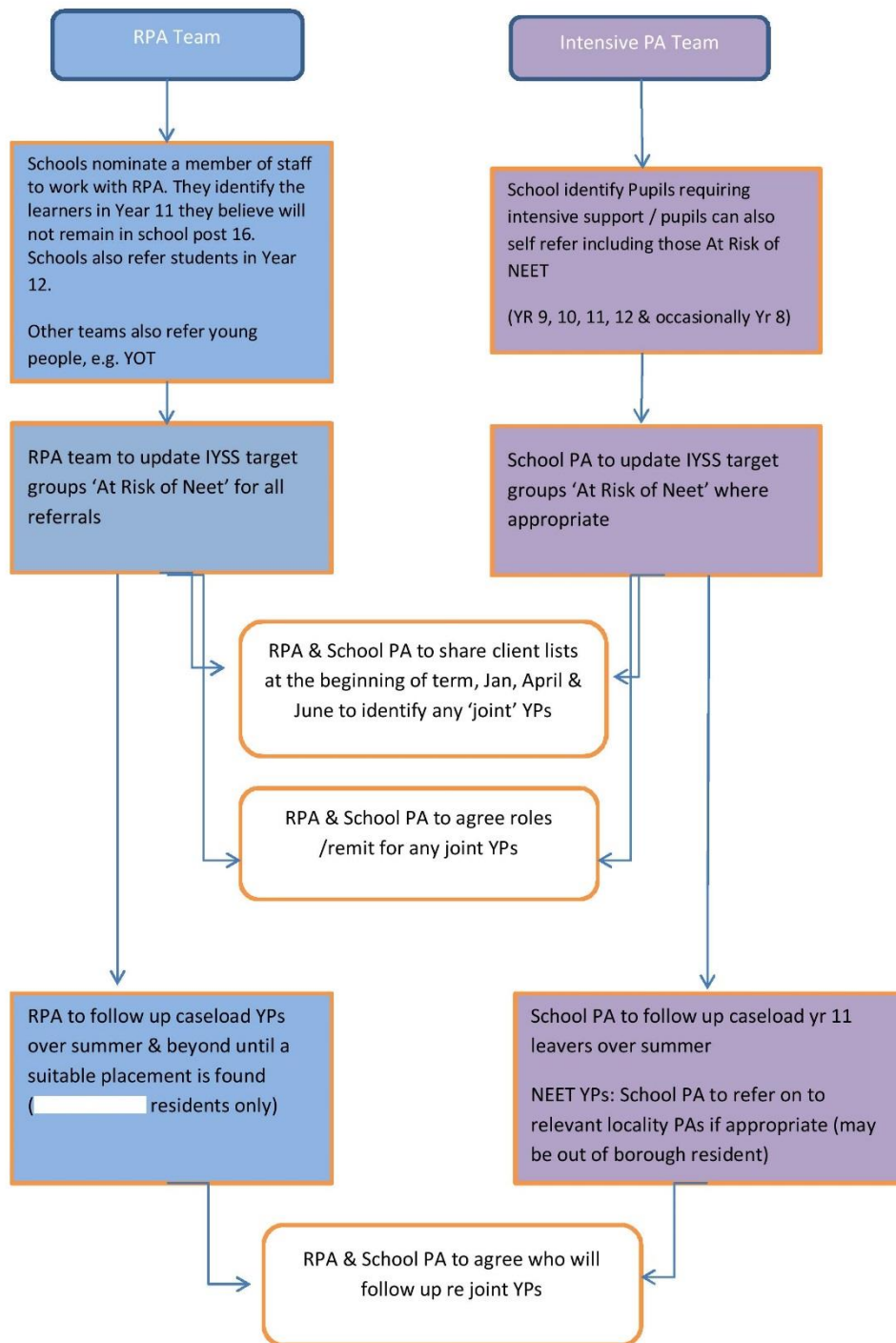


Figure 6.1: 'Year 11 At Risk of NEET Process'. Document shared by local authority officer (anonymised)

that young people in different areas are subject to. He told me that he supports the notion that central government should give broad direction to policy, set out funding priorities and outcomes. If you look at the variation in local provision, he said, there is a wide disparity in the number and quality of initiatives that are available for young people.

The supposed successes of the Youth Contract have been misleading, he told me. Training and education providers have been saying that they had a hundred outcomes, but you look at their books, he says, and they only had eight. They were just ‘going through the motions’, signing people up to programs, and then reporting that they had achieved more outcomes than was actually the case. He received reports from young people that some training providers offered poor quality services. Some of the young people had a ‘bad relationship’, he said, with these providers. He said that he will no longer refer young people to one of the local training providers. He mentioned one that does good work. He occasionally sees colleagues offering courses that are not appropriate for a young person. He said that when he sees that happening he steps in and stops this from happening. Many of the young people he works with are not able to travel to different areas because of ‘postcode’ conflicts. He expressed frustration that many young people will also not travel and would come to see him with their parents who end up answering his questions during interviews.

I asked him about tracking and monitoring work. He said it is not very interesting: he makes phone calls or home visits to ‘Activity Not Knowns’ who appear on the database, he told me that ‘it’s not rocket science’. It was simply a question of asking a standard list of questions, such as ‘What are you doing?’ After twelve months of a young person not being checked upon, their name ‘pops up’ when he logs in to the database. From there he can see a list of people who he needs to contact. Another youth worker, Ben, had told me about ‘tracking sessions’ where the youth service team assemble and get on their telephones to work through a list of names.

We walked up to his office where two colleagues and two young people were sitting. Yekile picked up on his meeting with Kyle who had been completing an application for McDonalds. Yekile asked questions about sections that Kyle was completing on the application form. Yekile instructed: ‘...and when you left school... even put there, other diplomas... it just says pass, that’s fine... did you get that at school?... when did you get each grade?... put it down’. This meeting between Yekile and Kyle would be recorded on the system by Yekile. It would be used to total what activities Yekile had undertaken with this client. It would be counted as a substantial intervention, where Yekile was working to move the Kyle ‘from NEET to EET’.

One of Yekile’s colleague cut across his and Kyle’s conversation. The colleague explained that the client sitting with him wants to apply for Employment Support Allowance. It may not be possible, Yekile said, because he is sixteen, he is supposed to be in school. Yekile suggested that, if they do try to apply, the online form will not work. They should ‘do a manual one’ and use the client’s friend’s home address on the form. He should say, Yekile advised, that he is ‘sofa surfing’. Yekile expects that social services will ‘knock it back’ and they’ll have to do it again. Yekile and Kyle resumed the application.

‘If you want to do a short course, for around six weeks, we may be able to arrange that, and that would pay for travel,’ he said, ‘we’ll talk about that on Thursday.’ Kyle has experience as a nursery assistant at a school. Yekile asked what skills that demonstrates to an employer. ‘Give another five minutes and we’ll continue this on Thursday,’ he said. So what skills does it demonstrate? Yekile answered for Kyle, ‘Trustworthy... can take instructions... good communication skills... honest... reliable.’

Yekile summed up what they are busy doing. ‘What you’re creating is a perception of what they’re looking for, with a hint of you.’ He told Kyle that he should indicate that he has experience in ‘retail environments’. He reassured him that it does not need to be an elaborate



text. ‘They don’t have time for reading, they just want bullet points, they just want to see that you’ve done that, you’ve done that...’ Yekile watched over Kyle’s shoulder, looked at the computer monitor, pointed out spelling mistakes on the screen, reminded him to capitalise words. Yekile’s colleague was approaching the end of this meeting. ‘Things you need to have to sort out, young man, yeah?’

#### 6.4 *The data officer*

In order to find out about how staff undertook record keeping and collected management information for implementing the Raising of the Participation Age, I followed up with local authority staff and data officers to see what these activities and software looked like. As well as Emily, I spoke with other local authority officers who dealt with or administered the collection of management information. One of these was Chris, a Data Officer. He showed me how he oversaw the Raising the Participation Age reporting procedures, how these procedures were attended to through software accessed by youth service staff in a number of local authorities, and how he instructed youth service staff about reporting requirements.

He told me that the London local authorities have the same software supplier, though each one configures their database differently. He points to the map pinned up on the side of his workstation cubicle. There are five groupings of London local authorities, so-called ‘sub-regional units’ who have entered into a partnership to produce Management Information reports: Croydon, East London, North London, South London, and West London<sup>4</sup>. Each local authority has their databases ‘top-sliced’ so as to filter basic information about the cohort into

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<sup>4</sup> The list of local authorities in each of the sub-regional units as of 2016: ‘East London’: Barking & Dagenham, Bexley, City of London, Greenwich, Havering, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets; ‘North London’: Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Waltham Forest; ‘South London’: Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Sutton, Richmond; ‘West London’: Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow.

a shared dataset, the London Client Caseload Information System (LCCIS). This is done, Chris states, to share information across thirty-three London local authorities. ‘So, for example, somebody who’s a Southwark resident could also be on the East London database, because they’re going to school in Lewisham, and so we share information, because, kind of, the movement of young people across London, to go to school, go to work, and where they live. So that, we’re all carved up like’.

Chris shows me his level of access on the database and record-keeping software, as ‘super-duper access’ when compared with caseworkers, personal advisors, youth support workers, team leaders, or partnered authorities’ ‘M.I. persons’. As a Data Officer, he works with a team to manage the database on behalf of numerous local authorities, submitting their management information, checking their ‘data integrity’. He has a number of *log-in roles*. On the database, Chris is in an ‘administrative role’ and can ‘see all the different login roles’, such as the ‘caseworker role’, and ‘youth worker role’. On the database, users are named as ‘people, which is staff’. Then there are other categories. ‘Other entities are how we group, um, people together, so teams of people, so all of [one local authority] staff are a team of people, [another local authority] staff, so that why you can say, ‘well what work have [that local authority staff done]?’ ... rather than knowing exactly who works for who’. Chris clicked through pages on the screens, pointed out different icons and labels that can be selected, ‘R’ for ‘RPA met’. These and other labels fill up an individual record’s ‘indicator ribbon’.

Chris told me that there are two sides to the database: the youth service side and a CCIS/RPA side. The Youth Service side is sometimes referred to as ‘group work’. There is currently no national reporting requirement on youth service provision. The DfE does not require local authorities to submit information on interventions. ‘There was in the past’, he said. And yet, those interventions undertaken by users, whether caseworkers or personal

advisors, are still recordable, countable, reportable. There is a standard list of interventions included on the software, such as 'follow up letters, group contacts, home visits, information, personal contacts, um, some extra other ones'. These interventions distinguish between those that are 'significant' and 'not significant'. In the 'Intervention User Guide', prepared by Chris and the team, the significance of the intervention depends upon the type of action undertaken. The appendix of the User Guide lists thirteen types of interventions that count as significant, thirty-seven that do not. The guide offers a definition of the work that 'counts as significant':

'These will be where you've had a two-way, in-depth, individual 'conversation' with the young person, normally including advice / guidance / support...'

For work that does not count as significant, these 'interventions that are not directly with the young person,' or parents, carers or other professions. The software offers a template for recording interventions, 'but, you know, people can put in whatever they like'. Users are also asked to record the 'outcomes' of an intervention. For instance: 'so, the intervention results in a [drugs and substance] screening... I had a one-to-one contact with the young person and we did a [drugs and substance] screening... and, I did a home visit and it was a door knocking'.

Some of the sub-regional unit's local authorities have their database set up to record specialist interventions for 'local monitoring'. Reporting outcomes is not mandatory as 'not every intervention will result in an outcome'. Neither is there a 'hard and fast rule', he says, about what information youth service staff are required to record. Chris receives requests from youth clubs about their attendance records, for instance, to submit funding bids. They generate 'historical research reports' from records of young people who have attended youth service provision. There is a 'stock report sitting there, reading to run, or if we're done it for one youth club, we'll save it, so keep the report, and if another asks... just need to change it

for the different youth club’. Then there is a whole series of reporting categories. Chris amends the project reference number and ‘it’ll show the gender, ethnicity and age, for a particular project’. Then there is the possibility of building a report with the team’s software by selecting fields from the database. There are not the ‘bog standard reports’ and can be set up on ‘the record-keeping software for people to run themselves’. Then there are more specific reports. Chris may receive a request from an ‘M.I. person’ at another local authority. These specific reports may be easy or they may not.

And the specific requests just come through to us, and we go, ‘okay yeah, that’s fairly easy’, or um, one I was doing you could just not get the formula to work, returning the same thing for everybody, so I went to [database supplier] and said, ‘oh can you look at my formula and tell me where I’ve gone wrong,’ and ‘oh yeah, you just need to add this,’ and then we have a- a- sheet that we have, which puts handy formulas that we can use in different [reports].

The CCIS/RPA side is sometimes referred to as ‘case work’. This side involves local authorities fulfilling a statutory duty to report on young people in participation. Namely, their current *activity*. The details of what local authorities are required to report is distributed to youth service staff through an annually released Management Information Specification Guide prepared by Chris and his team. The original document from which Chris adapts this specification guide is released every financial year by the DfE. Since 2011 there have been over [thirty] changes to the RPA reporting requirements. Based upon the guidelines documents released by the Department for Education, there have been twenty nine changes to the reporting requirements since the issuance of the 2013/14 specification guide, up to the 2017/18 specification guide. These changes include the: addition of new fields; addition of new codes; revising the ‘NEET adjustment’ formula; the addition of new codes; removal of reporting requirements; removal of Youth Contract indicator; relaxing of the requirement to

track up to 18 years old<sup>5</sup>. These changes are made depending ‘on what ministers, um, are asking for’. The list of requirements are presented in these specification guides, which Chris translates from, what he calls, ‘techno babble’ into a Submission Guide for users. This guide lays out what the workers need to provide to the CCIS about the ‘reportable cohort’.

As of 2016, local authorities are required to submit data returns on a monthly basis. To submit this data, Chris has to ensure that each record contains the specified items of information in the correct file format. Each month, the current state of the Management Information is locked, and each local authorities’ records are used to produce a ‘NCCIS extract’, which operates as a ‘snapshot’ of the reportable cohort. This NCCIS extract of local authorities’ records is then submitted to the DfE. Chris and the team do not have such an archiving program ‘for the youth service side of things’. He checks errors on the system before submitting the cohort’s records. There is a whole list of potential errors. Some errors are ‘priority one errors’, some are ‘priority two’. These errors are not simply checked by eye. Some of the potential errors concern whether details have been filled in about specific ‘target groups’.

So if you say somebody is a teenage parent, they’re NEET teenage parents, you have to actually tick the box that says they are a teenage parent. But there’s rules and workflows built within (our software) to stop that from happening. So if you say that somebody is a NEET teenage parent, that pops up as a message saying: ‘Oh right, you’ve now got to change their target group’. So that kind of thing. But you will have some people who are teenage parents but aren’t NEET. So it doesn’t work the other way around

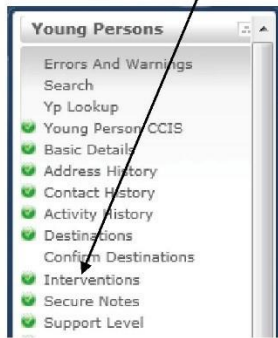
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<sup>5</sup> These guidance documents are available on the Department for Education’s website, for the list of changed to the required reporting procedures see the DfE’s documents itemising the NCCIS reporting requirements in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

## 6 Appendix: Recording an Intervention

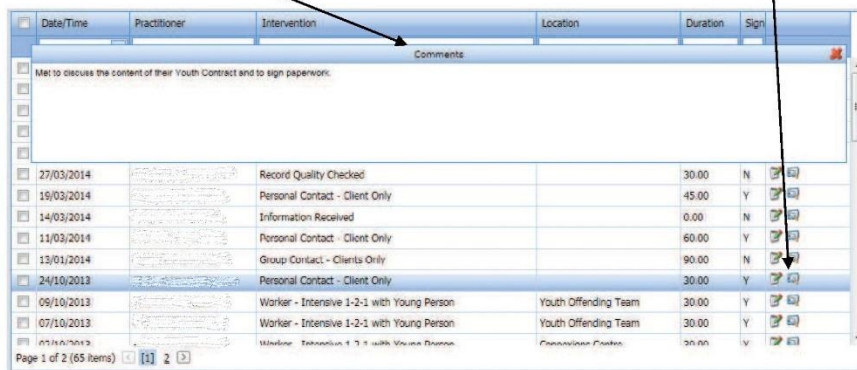
The principle is the same, but local authorities may have additional requirements for users for non-mandatory fields – consult with your line manager if you are unclear.

Go to the main record of the client you want to record an intervention for. Click on the Interventions sub-menu under the Young Persons menu.



### 6.1 Viewing comments in interventions

If you wish to view the comments recorded for an intervention, then click on the View icon of intervention you wish to read; if a comment has been written for that particular intervention it will show up in the comments box.



### 6.2 Recording a new Intervention

If you wish to record a new intervention click on the "New Intervention" button.



This will bring you to the page shown below:

Figure 6.2: 'Recording an Intervention'. Source: IYSS User Guide, August 2014  
(anonymised by author)

In order to ensure that the database is legible and error-free prior to submission, Chris and his colleagues checks the reportable cohort of 'live clients'. The M.I. program, he describes, identifies that, 'you've got this many errors and you have to fix them'. One of the online checks that he uses is through the Learner Record Service (LRS). This checks on a daily basis and identifies whether for live clients who do not have a Unique Reference Number (URN) on the database, one can be found on the LRS. Their database has a 'protocol' that contacts the LRS daily, and 'performs a match against the Learner Record Service', then 'populates that field focus'.

Chris and his team also receives college lists and the school census. The school census is collected three times a year. 'We ask for the school census data from the October census... and also the January one. We don't take the May one, because all the information we need is in the October and the January. It's odd, because the October census doesn't include ethnicity but the January one does'. Both the lists and the censuses have the Unique Reference Number (URN) in them, 'which makes it easier for us to update their records, cos the name might be different in the two lists but the 'URN' is the same'.

Chris has a set of 'test clients' to run simulations on the database software. One of these he refers to as the 'boy that's got everything... in terms of ticks and crosses, he's got everything ticked.' Some of the test clients will not have them all, some of them are 'legacy' from when there was a national Connexions database. He goes to the 'activity history' for the 'boy that's got everything', 'so I can see that, attended a youth service session on the third of November, and, um, there was an intervention with, on the twenty fourth of September, sorry, and then if I just want to look at the notes... Obviously with a real young person it's much more in-depth than that. So sometimes an intervention is just saying, I rang and left a message. That would be seen as non-significant.' Then there are other problems Chris has to deal with.

One problem is with the category of 'live clients' may have moved out of the borough. If that happens, Chris may receive information that they have moved, but another local authority M.I. team may not have them on their database. In that case, these supposedly 'live clients' stay as members of 'our cohort until we work out where they're gone'. Occasionally they are contacted by schools with news that pupils have moved out of the U.K.

For example a couple of our schools were saying, these three are actually going back to Brazil in Spring. Thank you for letting us know. Rather than them languishing on our database, not knowing where the hell they are, and then eventually we discover

Another set of problems are those records mistakenly treated as duplicates and subsequently deleted. This is why, Chris states, different users have different levels of access and ability to modify, update or delete records. This puts 'a bit more control' in Chris' hands if workers need to request to amend or delete records. 'The same thing if we're merging duplicates, there's very few of us who can merge them because we have got situations where you've got twins, with one letter the difference'. This presents a challenge. 'And it looks like a duplicate but it's not, they are twins. I think it's Michelle and Michella... one 'L' the difference.'

Other changes are made to records to prevent workers from undertaking tracking or monitoring when clients are deceased. This involves the 'archiving' of records.

The other thing we do is if someone, um, passes away, we archive them as soon as possible. So sometimes it can be, ah, through ill health and other times it's through, as a result of being a victim of violent crime... So, as soon as we find out, we take them off the database because what we don't want to do is get in a situation where we ring a family to find out what they're doing... it's just awful, awful... you can get down that horrible route of the family being contacted



This archiving procedure prevents records being ‘visible at the front end’. These records are still ‘on the database’, although ‘everything’s got deleted’. Effectively, for Chris and the team, ‘the way that we manage the database is, they come off’.

### 6.5 *Participation reports*

The information collected by youth workers, case workers, data officers and local authority staff on the NCCIS about the RPA duty is subsequently used to produce statistical summaries of the status of cohorts within each borough. These ‘data releases’ are prepared and released by the Department for Education. The statistical summaries based upon these data returns are delivered in the form of ‘Participation Reports’ at London Councils meetings. In these meetings, statistical accounts are presented by policy officers. These policy officers offer an example of how these reports provide cases of ‘data-in-use’. This data is incorporated within activities that involve instructing assembled members about what meaning to give to this data (Housley and Smith 2011; Mair, Greiffenhagen and Sharrock 2016). As such, the data is shaped by this group’s practical orientation to organisational reporting requirements in the way they manage their intervention work. Discussing these participation reports is a standard activity, a ‘standing item’ at these meetings where members discuss the implementation of the RPA duty.

These reports are delivered at meetings attended by local authority staff, such as Nigel, and between ten and fifteen other members who assembled to strategize the direction of policy and service provision for young people’s education and skills (YPES) policy in London. We will use transcripts from this setting in the next chapter, but suffice to say that other attendees at these meetings included local authority youth service staff, councillors, members of other regional governance agencies (i.e. the Greater London Authority), national

funding agencies (i.e. the Education Funding Agency), and private sector representatives involved in education and skills policy. At these meetings, the current status of local authorities' implementation of the RPA duty is a standing item on the agenda, under the title of 'Raising the Participation Age'. Delivering these reports is not a headline item, but tends to take place near the end of a meeting. These Participation Reports are prepared and delivered to the attendees by members of the London Council's staff.

These Participation Reports are one of three standing items which are delivered at the London Councils YPES Board and Operational Sub Group meetings. The two other reports, one on Destination Measures and one on GCSE and A-Level results, are also delivered at meetings subsequent to the Department for Education releasing the relevant data. Each of these reports are produced as part of the pack of Looped Papers that are circulated prior to each meeting. These Looped Papers are sometimes amended for errors after the meeting. The Participation Reports are included in printed copies of the Looped Papers and set to the side of the room before the start of each meeting. These Looped Papers present statistical data in the form of a 'background and information' section about the RPA duty, a set of frequency tables, line graphs, bar charts, and a variety of colour-coded maps depicting the statistical levels of NEETs and Not Knowns in each of the London local authorities.

One of the policy officers delivers either one of these report at the meetings. They introduce the main findings of the statistical releases, identifying what members should attend to in the report. In this way the officer's presentation demonstrates how the presentation of participation data requires more than the reading out of numbers and figures, but also involves 'interweaving of cultural and technical reasoning' (Mair, Greiffenhagen and Sharrock 2016: 54). The statistical content of the report needs to put given some occasioned relevance to the assembled group. When the group move on to this agenda item, London Councils' Policy Officer introduces the report to the Board or OSG members by offering a

spoken preamble. In this preamble the officer offers provisos about each report and suggests courses of action for assembled members about what each report means. These provisos point out details in the printed report that may not have been noticed upon initial inspection. These include amendments, notable changes in statistical figures, and so on. He thereby ‘fills in’, ‘flags up’, ‘highlights’, and ‘brings to the attention’ of members, those disparities and variations in published figures that may go unnoticed. It is in this way that the policy officer uses the occasion to deliver these reports to instruct members to use organisationally relevant practices to make features of the report visible to members, and undertake actions such as commending members to ‘take that back and look at it’.

Um, just to start with a reminder that this will be the last month in the calendar year that we produce all the tables... not known, um, because this is when the stats go a little bit hairy, this is the, uh last opportunity we have, if you can see on the report, um, tells you what the state of play is, uhm, uh, the- the trends that we previously reported uh, remain the same in July, which is the latest figures that we have, I think it's worth perhaps looking at uh paragraph two, um, I really, like OSG members to- to take the report back to their councillors and boroughs because, in paragraph two this is a- a perfect example of, where the statistics, based on a London-wide figure really mask disparities between boroughs, uh those boroughs that have been doing well on participation are doing even better, but, looking back, in December fourteen there were, seven boroughs, seven boroughs, uh, where participation had decreased, in- in December, sorry in June fifteen it's uh thirteen boroughs where participation has increased, so, so whilst London as a whole has gone up, there- there are now more boroughs than there were six months ago where participation has decreased so, uh the London as a whole figures really does need to get down to the- the- the real detail about what is happening at the borough level, so I do urge you to take that back a- and look at it

In delivering this report, the policy officer treats the statistical figures to an analysis that exhibits his ability to identify what is and what is not expected, and therefore, what needs to be noticed about current levels of NEET and ‘Activity Not Known’. His comments also explain how the group should read these figures. These are described in relation to a calendar

barking & dagenham • unknown cohort • june 2016

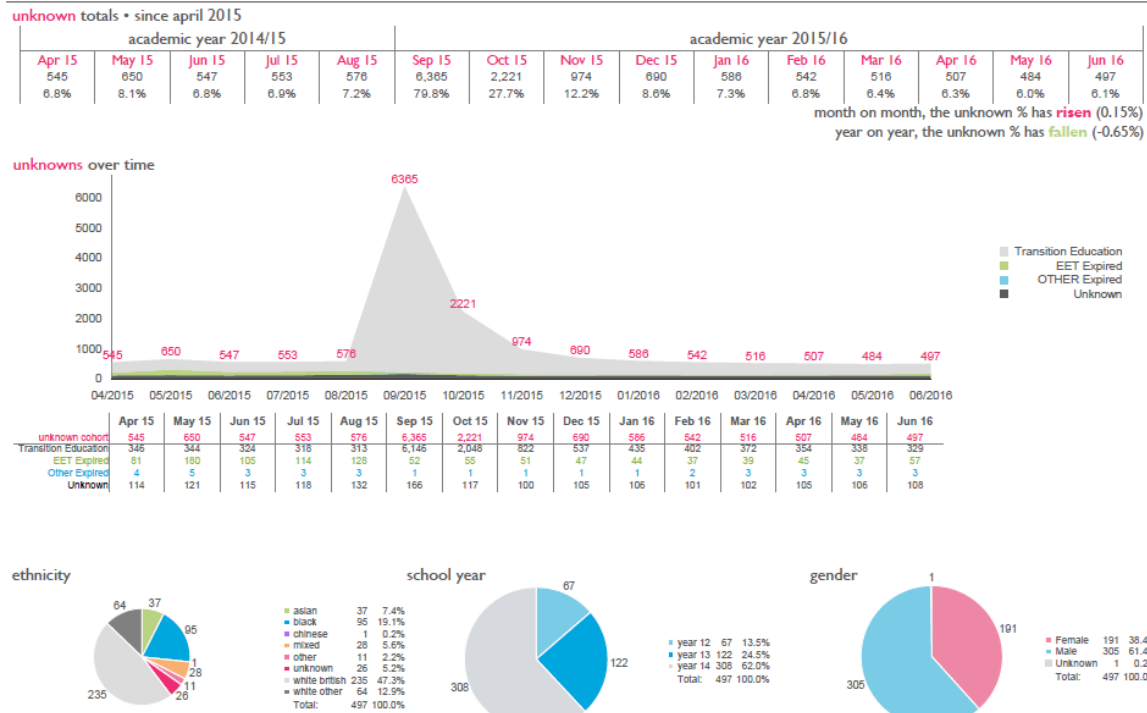


Figure 6.3: ‘15Billion’ (2016: 16) Monthly Management Information Report produced by ‘15 Billion’ for London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, June 2016.

of past and future meetings. This is not always done with dispassionate precision, nor are these preambles lacking in colloquial, humorous, and occasionally apologetic commentary. The preambles offer a sense of showing attendees how to read this report in relation to a calendar of past and future reports. ‘Just to start with a reminder that this will be the last month in the calendar year that we produce all the tables... because this is when the stats go a little bit hairy’ This ‘little bit hairy’ is also commented upon by another member of staff. This other staff member offers a gloss about what this ‘bit hairy’ might mean. This is followed by providing a reason for the group’s standard reporting procedures.

We’re just at the tail end... Of just sorting out what happens over the- just after the summer period where everything goes into, um, nationally it goes into meltdown. It’s one of the reasons you don’t actually report the NCCIS figures for August, September, October, November, because even the Department admits that it’s all pretty- pretty nonsensical. The Department actually takes, it backs off beating anybody up over the Activity Not Known figures during that period

In considering this report, the board and operational sub-group member are advised about how this report should be understood as occurring at a specific point in time where the figures, ‘go into meltdown’ (see Figure 5.3). At another meeting, the Policy Officer offers the preamble that the figures in the circulated report is incomplete. He shows this by describing why the figures in paragraph four have not been included. He addressed this account to the ‘Chair’ of the meeting and says that he could not ‘update’ the paragraph due to the timing of the statistical release.

I was rather hoping that the information that would of, uh, updated paragraph four, would have been available for, uh, by now Chair, unfortunately the information was only published, the- this morning, and the- and I’ll give you some headlines from that um, as we go through

Any of these matters offer themselves as relevant considerations to comprehend the orientation of attendees to the Participation Report. Although the Policy Officer claims that the ‘facts speak for themselves’ in these printed reports, he and the group find what there is to make of those facts through reasoned exchanges that follow the preamble. As the report enumerates the levels of NEETs and Not Knowns amongst different cohorts of young people, the reports seems to be used to call each member to recognise their responsibility. Each member of the group can be held to account for these results, especially councillors and local authority staff.

When delivering other reports, namely the Destination Measures, another Policy Officer plays up the potential for ‘comparison’ and ‘competition’ between different boroughs. The score card for this competition are found in the ‘graphs at the back’ of the looped papers. The chair laughs, seeming to acknowledge the instruction to ‘compare’. He then repeats the policy officers’ instruction to ‘compare to everybody else’s’.

### **Transcript G**

(P: Policy Officer; M: Member; C: Chair)

P: Um, before you get to the really exciting stuff which is the graphs at the back [of this, each local authority and where you [compare=

M: [(*laughing*)

C: [(*laughing*)

P: [=To everybody else

C: [Compare to everybody else’s

P: Compare to everybody else’s, not that we’re saying competition ( ), uh just to draw your attention to the second page and to the GCSE ( ), which is looking at the GCSE provisional results

For the participation reports, the Policy Officer notes that the rates require commenting upon, whether the rates are higher, lower, improving, and so on. In the main, the Policy Officer’s report delivery includes discussion of observable trends for the city as a whole, as well as

comparisons in the published figures between the London, national and other regional averages. On the occasions when individual boroughs are named, either the policy officer, the Director, or one of the members offers up an explanation. This explanation tends to suggest that that borough's issues are more widespread than that single case. The first example is shown by indicating how the notion of 'everything', which is repaired to 'nationally', is the category that should be used explain the figures.

### **Transcript H**

(M: Member; C: Chair; D: Director)

C: Okay, I can't quite help noting that Southwark's not knowns are high, just beating you

M: But I thought we were pretty good last time we looked at these figures, so that

D: We're just at the tail [end

M: [( )

D: At the tail end of just sorting out what happens over the, just after the summer period where everything goes into um, nationally it goes into meltdown

The Chair's turn begins with an 'okay'. As Schegloff writes, 'okay' can be used to 'mark or claim acceptance of a second pair part and the stance which it has adopted and embodies within the sequence' (2007: 120; for more on the use of 'okay', see 120-123). The chair then moves to initially characterise that his attention is drawn to one borough's Not Knowns. He then characterises a stance towards making his observation, 'I can't quite help noting that...' His observation then characterises the levels of not knowns as 'high'. This way of counting the figures shows how members notice figures in relation to a members' 'measurement system'. Sacks discusses the way that speakers use measurement devices and the how a system of such devices are used to describe what is seen (1992: 435-440). This measurement

device of ‘high’ is then tied to an assessment of the observed levels of another member of the group. These two observations treat the measurement system as comparative and not one which requires stating the numerical difference in terms of rates or percentages. This shared assessment is made in this move that does more than ‘take in the figures’. His observation about Southwark is also demonstrably made in relation to his identity as a councillor within that borough. His observation could also be treated as citing the ‘competitive’ and comparative element of the discussion. The characterisation of ‘beating you’ also seems to suggest that they are playing a game whilst members keep score. This ‘you’ also has interesting characteristics in as much as it posits that the ‘you’ the comment is directed at stands-in for the borough that the data is treated as representing. The chair’s turn seems to orientate to this ‘you-borough’ device. This members’ turn then seems to be orientated to by the director as initiating a search for an account about what has happened since the ‘last time we looked at these figures’. The director then offers an account in lieu of an explanation for the figures. This account cites a territorial category, ‘nationally’, as a self-initiated repair for an ‘everything goes... into meltdown’. As Schegloff writes, ‘repairs’ are ways that members treat ‘troubles and problems’ in talk. In the case of self-repairs, ‘It is quite common for a speaker to address some problem in their own talk – past or upcoming – and carry through the repair to completion: self-initiation of repair leading to self-repair’ (2007: 101; on other forms of repair sequences, i.e. other-initiated repair, pp. 149-151; and, ‘disagreement-implicated other-initiated repair, pp. 151-155). This repairs an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) by positing the relevance of ‘nationally’ to the state of the figures at this time. This is done without expanding upon the significance of relevance of ‘the summer period’

This second case of members offering explanations for the participation data presented on the participation report involved suggesting that there are ‘some quite big



changes' that can be used to explain the figures. Again the chair mentions one borough who, in his terms, were a 'complete outlier'. The Chair, three members of the board and the Director produce a reasoned, shared account of what changes there are to notice in the visible data. This was followed by the Director again offered an account that encompassed talk of 'outliers' with an expansion about how Croydon have done 'a lot of work'.

### **Transcript I**

(C: Chair; M1-3: Members of Board; D: Director)

C: We had a complete outlier last year, Bromley

M1: Croydon (many)

C: Who are not outliers anymore

M2: They're not great

C: They're not great but they're not outliers anymore

M3: No, but they've done a lot of work

D: They have, and I think a significant amount of their systems of moving their data systems around which didn't help either and arguably probably also a couple of our outliers we know that they actually had some quite big changes in terms of how they managed some of this, so we're probably seeing the results of that, I have faith

C: But if we're talking about twenty percent of our eighteen, we're talking about thousands of young people

Although the Director's account seems to settle what is happening with the 'outliers' a topic closing move with a summative statement of the speaker's 'faith' (Schegloff 2007). The Chair's challenge indicates that the topic has not been adequately addressed. This is done by stating the size of the potential cohort that are being discussed.

When the policy officer introduced the Participation Report, besides giving a quick summary of the conditions under which the report should be read, he also highlights specific trends to notice, and the expected 'disparities' between boroughs that the London wide figure masks. For each of these observations he ties specific actions for the assembled group. These actions were not just for this meeting, although there were those, such as looking at data

tables, amending the numbers on data tables. He offered suggestions about what topics the ‘board might reflect on’. He suggests that the members of the Operational Sub-Group use the report to inform councillors about the participation data and ‘where the statistics... mask disparities’.

‘I’d really like OSG members to- to take the report back to their councillors and boroughs because, in paragraph two, this is a perfect example of, where the statistics, based on a London-wide figure really mask disparities between boroughs’

The policy officer expresses a preference for the assembled ‘OSG members’. He relates to a ‘perfect example’ of a noticeably calling attention to what the ‘London-wide’ statistics do not illustrate. The policy officer moves to identify where that this example is found ‘in paragraph two. This is an ‘example of’, as he calls it, these ‘disparities between boroughs’. In moving through the introduction of a Participation Report, the policy officer indicates what should be found as relevant.

This last sequence picks up after a similar suggestion made by the policy officer. On this occasion the policy officer’s ends his introduction to the report by ‘urging’ that members ‘take that back and look at it’. This was then followed by a suggestion. One of the members offered this suggestion in the form of giving an account of the ‘massive Not Knowns’.

## **Transcript J**

(P: Policy Officer; M1-4: Board Members; D: Director)

P: I do urge you to take that back a- and look at it

M1: Can I make a suggestion? The massive not known that the three month average in January, [a lot [of those

M2: [mm

D: [mm

M1: Kids are now being tracked, you know=

D: =Yeah ( )

M1: Which meant a lot of-  
P: But- but if that were the case, um participation surely would have increased, not decreased  
M1: No, because (not) identifying kids that were NEET but were listed as not known, and yet ( ) issues  
M3: Yeah that's the issue isn't it?  
P: This is the participation figure, so if you've, if you've identified kids as being NEET, they wouldn't be participating  
M1: Exactly  
M3: Or the not known  
P: But they wouldn't have been, they wouldn't have been counted as participating  
M1: Oh I see what you mean yeah  
P: Yeah=  
M4: =Yeah  
M3: Just a different [category  
P: [This is not about NEET and not known, this is the participation figure

One of the many interesting features of this sequence is the tussle over settling what 'counts as participating'. In one sense, the member's suggestion could be heard as an 'other initiated repair' by one of the members. This seems to be supported by 'mm' tokens and a 'yeah'. This repair runs aground when the policy officer challenges this suggestion, orientating to what have been the inevitable consequence if what the member said was correct. The member refutes this assertion. The policy officer moves to clarify where the confusion may have arisen. This is done by differentiating between young people who would and who would not have been counted as participating. The member who made the suggestion then moves to align with the policy officer's explanation which refutes the 'kids are now being tracked' suggestion. He uses a canonical change-of-state token ('oh') to preface his turn: 'oh I see what you mean yeah'.

The observable features of Participation Reports acknowledge that there are difficulties in making sense of what the participation data means. How policy officers convey this meaning, what actions assembled members should take given this data, and how they answer questions about what the different categories refer to shows how participation data is

routinely constituted. Delivering participation reports involves the production of actions within meetings that settle what this set of participation data means, in what way it is consequential for the members around the table and for other persons that attendees are in contact with when they ‘take back’ the reports, what the report should be understood as stating about how each of the London boroughs compare with each other, across regions, and nationally, and what the members should do if there is a noticeable borough or phenomena that is made noticable. Special attention need to be paid to the way that the policy officer, director, chair and members discuss these reports, and how they displayed a shared understanding of what data was significant, in that it *needed* to, or that members state that it *can’t help* but, be noticed, and in what ways this noticing is treated as relevant to the attendees’ ongoing work of implementing the RPA duty.

## 6.6 Conclusion

The chapter has developed our preoccupation with analysing how ‘NEET to EET’ transitions are organised through professional work practices. By presenting a case study of how participation data is collected, returned and reported upon, the chapter has further elaborated upon the way NEETs feature as a routine aspect of professional work practices. It presented materials from fieldwork, documents and transcripts of meetings to show how participation data is treated as a practical topic of interest to members through the ordering of their work activities. In doing so the chapter has sought to specify how NEET groups are treated within the collection of population data about youth cohorts, and thereby show how NEET statistics are treated as a practical matter. These requirements encompass the way that participation data is produced, how and when they need to be returned, how they should be understood when reported upon, how to structure explanations that account for the differences in participation rates across different localities, and so on. The chapter has described how an

ethnomethodological approach to participation data offers a focus on the practical procedures through which members of local authority youth service staff routinely dealt with the maintenance of management information. The examination of these procedures provide scope for examining the procedures through which statistics, information and data is procedures are used to orientate towards statistics, information and data are treated as ‘institutional products’. Examining how staff relied upon shared practices to make sense of these institutional products offers social scientists the possibility of examining the routine requirement for professionals to account for their work on ‘NEET to EET’ transitions.

The chapter indicated how this participation data was made sense of through practical knowledge, common-sense reasoning and other ordering devices which specified the meaning and relevance of this data. In this way participation data is not treated as either a stand-alone object or purely constructed through discursive acts, but as a social object that is interactionally produced through the organisation of routine work practices. These practices, and the data produced through these practices, were of ongoing concern in different ways in each section. As Chris, the data officer, was keen to emphasise, following these procedures requires that he and his colleagues made efforts to ensure ‘data integrity’. The production of participation data is therein located in the routine, effortful and distributed tasks undertaken through inputting, archiving, error-checking records of interventions with case workers, and following guidance about fulfilling reporting requirements to regularly conduct ‘data returns’ about ‘reportable cohorts’. Rather than relying upon statistical data to make a case about the *state of youth unemployment* or *NEET levels* in geographic locations, the chapter has attempted to show how these procedures are the product of sense making practices visible in local authority intervention work. In doing so, the chapter has also looked to contribute to ethnomethodological literature on the social organisation of statistics and social policy analyses that focus on the relationship between unemployment and statistics. The chapter has

sought to emphasise the practical knowledge that professionals display about the structures of government agencies, national policy frameworks, management information systems, the calendar for admissions during academic year, the relation between demography and geography within local authority areas, and so on.

The following chapter builds on this how this knowledge and understanding of structures of government agencies and national policy frameworks in order to focus on another setting where ‘NEET to EET’ transitions preoccupy professional work practices. Just as we had already begun to explore in the ‘Participation Reports’ section of this chapter, the presentation of reports to members of the board at London Councils is interactionally produced in talk and conduct. The following chapter builds on this initial examination of the relation between intervention work in order to develop an understanding of the practices through which lobbying, advocacy and campaigning activities are used to work on ‘NEET to EET’ transitions. This largely focuses on how NEETs can be addressed through changes to educational policy and provision. The chapter will go on to detail some potential lines of future inquiry for examining how lobbying and advocacy groups make sense of regulatory and policy change through creating pieces of work and campaigning activities.

## **SEVEN.        The Work of Lobbying for London's Youth**

This last analytic chapter turns to discuss some work practices constitutive of lobbying, advocacy and campaigning. In looking to describe the way that members organise their activities to lobby on issues associated with 'NEET to EET' transitions, the chapter turns to a setting in which this is ongoing preoccupation of members. In meetings at a membership group concerned with young peoples' education and skills provision at London Council, various parties in these meetings talk about how to coordinate their activities by putting forward claims about what to lobby on, advocate on or start campaigning around, how those efforts should be managed, how these parties should go about demonstrating that they are working on such issues, and what outcomes they should and can expect to result from these efforts. Our focus in this chapter seeks to contribute to a relatively unexamined area of research on policy and lobbying research, namely the 'internal decision making' of interest groups (J.M. Berry 2010: 514), and how 'policy work' (Harper 1998) is undertaken through intragovernmental lobbying efforts. The chapter aims to further Elisabeth Clemens' (1997) notion of the 'organisational repertoires through which lobbying groups conduct advocacy work, and to offer some specific examples of the way that these repertoires are interactionally produced. The chapter will examine the way that deliberating about public affairs is interactionally produced through talk-in-interaction.

The chapter mostly draws on transcripts of meeting talk between members of the London Councils' Young Peoples' Education and Skills (YPES) Board and Operational-Sub Group during 2015 to 2016. Set up in 2011 to represent the interest of London local authorities, as of December 2015, London Councils had four members of staff supporting the YPES board and groups. The chapter focuses on their work to support the activities of the board and group and their interactions with non-members of staff who sit on the board and group which each met around three or four times a year. These are staff nominated and selected to sit as members of these groups, drawn from external strategic sector-based partners from secondary, further, higher and vocational educational associations, London government representatives (i.e. the GLA and Mayor's office), in partnership with London local authority officers and councillors. The analysis focuses on the transcripts of meetings where around fifteen members discussed the strategic direction of the group and how they formulate what should be done through their lobbying efforts. The chapter describes how the group discussed the relevance of topics to their group's activities, such as NEETs, changes to education and training policy, provision, legislation and funding frameworks. This is done principally through activities scheduled as agenda items during meetings and how members discuss what to do in regards to those items. This can involve discussing their shared strategy, presenting a work plan to board members, getting agreement about whether the board should produce a vision statement, discussing what this vision statement should include and what should be done with it. The chapter looks to explicate the interactional production and organisation of activities associated with organising strategies for lobbying for 'NEET to EET' transitions.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first offers an initial indication of the way that lobbying has been conceptualised in social and political science research on interest group and advocacy. I then present a couple of examples of how members of staff



presenting accounts about what their lobbying activities have entailed. The next section indicates the importance of explaining the knowledge that are displayed within meetings about the roles between lobbyists, members and legislators. This offers some further examination about how lobbying activities are discussed within the meetings and how they are formulated as accounts. The following two sections then offer a case for examining how lobbying work involves a future orientation towards the coordination of new objects and activities. I offer some examples of the way that members make sense of their shared work through the suggestion of ‘pieces of work’ that they can do together. The last section presents transcripts of talk between staff and members to show how they coordinate their understanding in talking about how issues and concerns should be addressed, and through this interactional work, come to a produce an understanding about the specific requirements for future lobbying or other activities.

### *7.1 Lobbying is...*

When members are devising what strategy to take, their discussions proceed through digressive conversations upon what action the group should take, how proceeding in one way or another may lead to fortuitous or unwanted consequences, how courses of action have already been embarked upon, and what upcoming initiatives the group needs to monitor. Each meeting is not a starting point but already in the middle of major developments in policy. It is little wonder then that social scientific analyses of lobbying, interest groups and advocacy approaches the topic of lobbying through highlighting the strategies, knowledge, skills, competencies, techniques, moves in a game, career paths, social networks, informational subsidies, utility maximising rationality, institutional incentives, organizational repertoires, issue networks, the normative basis, and agenda setting strategies. And yet it is clear that these topics are already of concern for members, and form the subject matter of

disagreements, efforts to clarify what moves to make, what techniques to use, what rationale is appropriate for their work, and so on.

In the academic literature on interest groups, the figure of the ‘lobbyist’ is identified through characterisations that do not conform to either the ideal-types of the expert or the well-informed citizen, the activist nor the campaign surrogate (Schutz 1946). And yet, these characterisations miss the organisational context in which they ply their trade. These following descriptions offer a small set of generic typifications about lobbyists, for example:

- ‘What lobbyists do to help their peaceably assembled members petition for a redress of grievances, which is what lobbying is’ (Holyoke 2014: 120);
- ‘Organized interests themselves must try to counter the activities of their opponents’ (Ainsworth 2002: 122);
- ‘Typically, lobbyists work with existing legislation, looking for ways to amend or kill aspects of it’ (Ainsworth 2002: 120-121);
- ‘[Lobbyists] have substantive expertise in a specific policy area, strong personal contact with key policy makers, and procedural knowledge of the process of policymaking’ (Godwin *et al* 2013: 8);
- A successful lobbyist needs to have a combination of ‘substantive expertise’, ‘process expertise’ and ‘people expertise’ (Godwin *et al* 2013: 215-226);
- ‘...the techniques that [lobbyists] rely upon when influencing federal policy...’ (Godwin *et al* 2013: 215);
- ‘Regardless of firm activity, here is the lobbyist’s charge: through strategy and knowledge, position the firm to be in the right political place at the right political time with the right political policy, doing so after having sought and secured political advantage over any and all competitors’ (Healy 2016: 306).

Each of these characterisations are potentially relevant to identifying what lobbyists and paid advocates' work involves. All of these characteristics could presumably be found in studying the conduct of professional lobbyists. These characteristics could then be observed in their interactions with legislators, policymakers, bureaucrats, clients, members of interest groups, other lobbyists, and opponents. In any one of these interactions, researchers could find 'interests' being furthered through strategic action, techniques for influencing policy, positioning the client to secure political advantage, and so on. Any of these characteristics could presumably then be found in the way that professional lobbyists work on policy area, and in our case, work on employment, education and training policy for young people. In devising a strategy that an interest group should take, the assumption that lobbyists engage in rational, purposeful, behaviour that supports members' interests, only explains so much about how professional lobbyists' actions are seen to have the visible property of 'furthering the interests of groups and clients'.

One way that staff talk about how they have worked to support the interests of members is to describe what staff members at London Councils have been submitting responses to government consultations. These responses are relayed at these meetings, through summarising the main points. In this example a policy officer tells the group about one such written response.

London Councils, (has) requested, as a part of its skills devolution that the London Levy is, uh well- the levy as over- overall, is top-sliced, and a certain proportion will then devolve down to London, and London local government as a whole is able to then (to) decide how that levy is best used, whether it's used to target NEETs, or it's used to target sixteen to eighteen year olds, um or whether it's target- used, as an overall to target adults and increase that- apprenticeships in those areas. That's been our request.

In offering this account, the staff member shows what actions staff have taken to advocate, and how their arguments have been formulated. In this account, NEETs are treated as a policy category used as a hypothetical example of how the group propose to use funds, or the 'proportion that is devolved down' to London Councils members. In this sense, NEETs are a recognisable policy category that can be referred to when lobbying and making 'requests' from central government. To take another example, another member of staff offers up a rule for the group at one of the Operational Sub-Group meetings. She offers this rule as an answer to a suggestion by a local authority officer. This rule exemplifies the group's strategy. The rule is: 'We don't tend to say anything, no-wise to apprenticeships' (OSG meeting). The rule neither commits the group to 'saying no' nor commits it to 'saying yes'. As an occasion with which to use the rule, the director indicates the relevance of this way of working to the groups' activities and how the rule can be formulate to make sense of what practical activities the group should orientate towards given their prior stance on this issue (on formulating 'rules' in administrative practice, see Collins 2016, Wagenaar 2008, Zimmerman 1972).

This rule differs from general formulas of what lobbying involves. Healy (2016) writes about the 'four Ps' of lobbying: preparation; penetration; presentation; and, perspiration. So too does such a rule differ from Scott's notion of the 'substantive norms of workaday lobbying' (2015). It displays the members of staff way of working on issues, and what their shared strategy should be. Instead, the rule is one that can be changed as tendencies noticeably change.

The rule has significance in regards to a 'meaning-contexture' which is not located on geographic maps, but within the history of the group's tendency to act in relation 'to apprenticeships' (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). She tells this rule to members, how the group should act in relation to this issue given how they have acted in the past. The rule speaks to the course of action the group has historically taken. So, how is this rule meaningful as an

## Young People's Education and Skills Operational Sub-Group

### AGENDA

**Chair:** Debi Christie      **Job title:** 16-25 Commissioning Manager (Specialist Provision)  
**Date:** 22 January 2016      **Time:** 10am to 12 noon  
**Venue:** London Councils, meeting room 1  
**Telephone:** 020 7934 9779      **Email:** [Anna-maria.volpicelli@londoncouncils.gov.uk](mailto:Anna-maria.volpicelli@londoncouncils.gov.uk)

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Item 1	Welcome, introductions and apologies	DC
Item 2	Notes of the last meeting and matters arising (for agreement)	DC
Item 3	Task and Finish Groups (WORKSHOP)  OSG members will agree the structure of group/s under each key theme and broad outcomes for each group, ensuring the outcomes link to the IoE recommendations, and avoiding duplication of effort.  – Data – Careers work – Curriculum development	DC/YB
Item 4	Policy update (paper - for information)	NS
Item 5	RPA – Participation report (to be tabled - for information)	POB
Item 6	Young People's Education and Skills Board draft agenda 25 February 2015 (to be tabled - for discussion and agreement)	YB
Item 7	Any Other Business	All

**Date of next meeting: 2016-17 schedule to be confirmed**

*Figure 7.1: 'Agenda' page in Looped Papers, London Councils' Young Peoples' Education and Skills (YPES) Operational Sub-Group. (Accessed online at London Councils' website).*

## Young People's Education and Skills Board

Thursday 14 July, 15.00 – 17.00

**Location:** London Councils, Meeting room 5, 59½ Southwark Street, SE1 0AL  
**Contact Officer:** Neeraj Sharma  
**Telephone:** 020 7934 9524      **Email:** [Neeraj.sharma@londoncouncils.gov.uk](mailto:Neeraj.sharma@londoncouncils.gov.uk)

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### Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Declarations of interest
3. Notes of last meeting and matters arising
4. Technical Education - For discussion  
(*presentation*)
5. Vision 2020 - For decision  
(*Paper – Peter O'Brien*)
6. Policy Update - For information  
(*Paper - Neeraj Sharma*)
  - General policy update
  - Area reviews (*verbal update*)
  - London Ambitions (*verbal update – Yolande Burgess*)
  - ESF update (*verbal update – Peter O'Brien*)
7. Raising the Participation Age - For decision  
(*Papers - Peter O'Brien and Yolande Burgess*)
  - Participation report
  - Proposed changes to local authority tracking procedures
8. Any other business

**Date of next meeting:** Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> November, 3-5pm, London Councils, meeting room 5

*Figure 7.2: 'Agenda' page in Looped Papers, London Councils' Young Peoples' Education and Skills (YPES) Board. (Accessed online at London Councils' website)*

item of lobbying work? How does it display that the lobbyist is rationally accounting for what course of action to take on apprenticeships? For one, it shows how the lobbyist reports back to the group what the group have tended to do, as a reminder to members of what their actions – and by implication, their strategy – has hitherto been. It shows the group what stance they have taken. When placed back within the exchange between the local authority officer, the rule is given another meaning.

OFFICER: Yeah I- I just think saying no and they're just going to do it anyway, you don't gain anything from that  
DIRECTOR: We don't tend to say anything no-wise to apprenticeships

As a response to the officer, the rule cites what the group's strategy has hitherto been. It does not comment on what 'they' – the Government – are proposing to do on apprenticeships. It reports to the group what stance that 'we' – both London Councils, their staff, and members making up YPES groups – have taken. The turn does this by treating the officer's suggestion in light of a group's strategic tendency. The turn does not dispute what the officer suggests. Instead, the lobbyist offers the rule, without speaking to what 'they' would do, nor assessing the course of action speculated upon by the officer, but by reporting what 'we' – the group – tend to do on this issue. As a rule about their lobbying work, this offers an initially curious case, one suggesting the importance of what 'not saying no' could mean as a maxim for lobbying. If not 'no', then what?

## 7.2 *Lobbyists, members, legislators*

Throughout the meetings, the group discussed the implications of reforms to the financing of school places, about complications with government initiated reviews of the provision of

further education in Area Reviews, the levels of youth unemployment, what gossip they have picked up at public events, public speeches, articles, research and news reports about upcoming announcements, whether the Treasury or ‘the Department’ are considering a change in direction, and what ‘signals’ they have picked up from government ministers about ‘what their thinking is’. In this way, there is much to be made of the form of ‘gossip’, ‘rumour’ and second-guessing that fills out these meetings.

There is not one single issue that was treated as preeminent. Not even selecting youth employment or ‘NEET to EET transitions’ would offer a comprehensive analytic procedure to code the groups’ discussions. Given that members take turns to define what they should be doing and who they should be doing it with, each member displays what they should do given their knowledge of the inner workings of educational institutions, training agencies, funding for public services, the consequences of changes to school place funding formulas, the main ‘takeaways’ from recently published reports about the supply of secondary school teachers, and so on. This knowledge of ‘the system’ – both of the educational and training routes that young people can take and of the educational, training or government agencies that fund or provide those routes – comprises a working knowledge of the demography of young people in the city, supply-chains of training providers, new initiatives in ‘employability passports’, recent disruptions to markets of providers, the implications of restructuring qualifications and grading thresholds, of members’ expectations about the possible impacts of new policies on supply chains, on planned changes to governance structures, when they can expect the results of national consultation processes, what meetings are coming up where they might be able to air grievances and bring attention to an issue.

And as each meeting proceeds with the group making their way through a list of scheduled agenda items, each item is associated with specific activities that can be treated as a concrete example of how the group work on their shared objectives. These items exhibit



what work the group sets for itself, and how meetings were treated as occasions for formulating ‘meaning-contextures’ for their work. In a similar sense as Izatt-White *et al* describe ‘leadership’ in post-compulsory education, this lobbying work involves ‘mundane’ arrangement of institutional activities through talking through complicated, technical matters of organisational work (Iszatt-White *et al* 2010).

On other occasions, board members just float ideas about what the board should be asking for:

‘...through our lobbying power in this group, lots more funding from somewhere please, would be fantastic. I’m sure we’ll find it eventually’

With such a suggestion, we see how a member may formulate what the board should want. The member commends this suggestions by citing noticeable characteristics of the group, that is their ‘lobbying power’ (for research on how ‘power’ is formulated in organisational meetings, see Whittle *et al* 2014). The board otherwise acknowledges this power by reflecting that ‘all the big players’ sit around the table as members of the group.

One way that members of staff display that the group are gaining attention is through anecdotes that reports recognition which the group has received from other institutional settings. There are a few examples during the meetings where the group’s work has been brought to the attention of one of the staff members. These occasions involve the staff member telling the group about how the group’s activities have been noticed by members of other organisations, i.e. ministers and senior personnel in government agencies and departments, and what this attention might mean for the group’s ongoing work. Part of maintaining the groups ‘power’ may well lie in receiving attention that validates their role within the ‘policy arena’ in which they operate.

The following examples offer two cases in which the Senior Director delivers stories evidencing this recognition. I will offer some remarks on a couple of aspects of the production of these stories (Sacks 1986). Greatbatch and Clark have elsewhere offered a general heuristic about the structure of stories, involve the recurring elements of ‘preamble’, ‘story preface’, ‘story’, ‘storyteller’s assessment’ and ‘key lesson’ (2010: 101-103). Both of the following two stories refer to the group’s campaign on the provision of careers guidance, called ‘London Ambitions’.

### **Transcript J**

(SD: Senior Director; VC: Vice Chair)

- SD: I had a meeting with the, uhm, he’s the head of economics, and enterprise, at Ofsted, just to talk to Ofsted about, what our plans in London are, particularly around London Ambitions, it was a really, interesting, open conversation, around some of the, frustrations, that we have, that we see, (when) careers in the framework, but we don’t see that translated into reports, etcetera, etcetera, uhm, he’s been tasked with writing, one of the, one of Ofsted’s thematic reports this year, so he’ll be writing a report around Careers and Enterprise and he’s actually asked, if ( ) London Ambitions (in it), as an annexe, not too shabby, that Ofsted wants to point to
- VC: (Print it out as) a wraparound and send it out as their policy

### **Transcript K**

(S1: staff member; VC: Vice Chair; M1: board member)

- S1: So yeah, talking about policy, um Jack and I have a meeting in the diary, to meet with, uh the Parliamentary under Secretary of State, Sam Gyimah MP
- VC: Next [week
- S1: [next Tuesday, yes, and just, I had a very excited members of my comms team send me an email, saying, ‘oh! Sam Gyimah has just been talking about London Ambitions in the House’, and that was on Tuesday=
- VC: =What! [I didn’t know about that, really?
- S1: [Yes, yes, and he was answering a question, and I’ll go straight to the bit around, uh so dadadada, ‘we are aware- we are not aware of any specific representations of the quality of careers provision in,’ and then he mentions two London boroughs, but then he goes on to say, ‘we want to spread excellent practice in

careers education, employer engagement across the country so that every young person regardless of background can access the inspirational guidance they need to prepare for working life, London Ambitions is great example of the collaborative approach=  
 ??: =Yes yes=  
 S1: =Which will transform the landscape of careers and employment support for young people in, [he again mentions the two boroughs=  
 VC: [there you go  
 S1: =Commissioned through, London Enterprise Panel, and London Councils, the report's recommendations include at least a hundred hours of experience of the [world of work, and so,=  
 VC: [fantastic, when, was that today?  
 S1: =That's that's, a pretty good mention in ( )  
 S1: That was on Tuesday  
 VC: Wow

On a first reading, the two stories indicate that the lobbyist has taken up the group's 'frustrations' with aspects of government policy. They both seem to offer occasions in which to show the success of the lobbyist's work. The lobbyist is, unsurprisingly, pleased to share accounts of the group's successes. In Greatbatch and Clark's terms, the key lesson from the stories are: 1) their campaign is going to be featured as an annexe in one of Ofsted's annual reports; 2) their campaign received a 'pretty good mention' in the House of Commons.

Both stories describe interactions with legislators and officials. And whilst the first story briefly cites the group's frustration about careers provision, the lobbyist's story favourably describes her interaction with an Ofsted official. The lobbyist characterises the exchange as a 'really interesting, open conversation'. It is to this end that the story offers the group an occasion for a perceptible shift in their relation towards Ofsted. The 'really interesting, open conversation' favourably portrays the staff member's interaction. This is indexed in relation to the 'open' aspect of their conversation. The member of staff ends the story with reporting upon a 'request' made. This request is not an answer to the suggestion of 'lots more funding', but an endorsement of the group's career guidance plan within the annexe of an official report.

The second story involves attention from then Parliamentary under-Secretary of State for Education, Sam Gyiamah. The story preface involves the staff member indicating that the following story builds upon prior talk: ‘So yeah. Talking about policy’. As such, it moves to make the story ‘topically relevant’ (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984). Once this topic has been nominated, the story involve a recounting of how the news was noticed and relayed by ‘a very excited member of my comms team’. As a membership category, the sequential placement of this category is instructional as to how the following account should be heard. The category is used to formulate the affective stance displayed by the news giver towards the following account. It is this ‘comms team’ member and their ‘very excited’ state that offers a forecasting cue about what affect the following story will produce. The staff member does not need to indicate whether the member of the comms team was ‘very excited’ due to finding, relaying this news, or otherwise. The positioning of the affective state suggests how the group should hear the following story.

The staff member seems to resist the interjecting inquiries initiated by board members, proceeding with reading the Secretary of State’s statement. The staff member provides a commentary upon her own move to locate the quote: ‘and I’ll go straight to the bit around, uh so dadadada’. As with the Ofsted story, members are expected to know what the shortened referent, ‘the House’, refers to.<sup>6</sup> These are institutional settings that the members orientate towards as a matter of shared concern. The story also displays how the group should evaluate their own work. Not just in terms of what the quote says about their work, but the very fact that their work is being talked about in that setting. The story is appraised by

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<sup>6</sup> Curiously, I followed up on the quote cited in this story. I attempted to locate when the statement was made to ‘the House’ in Hansard. The only record of this quote is not found as an ‘oral answer’ given by Sam Gyiamah, but as a response to ‘written question’ made by [name]. This search in the Hansard records also indicate further interesting features of the ‘quoted’ sections of the written answer that deserve further analysis. The story, in so far as it seems to indicate that the statement was made in ‘the House’ in misleading. For the purpose of this analysis, I have not sought to explain why this error, intentional or not, was made.

members during the reading of the quote: ‘yes yes’, ‘there you go’, ‘fantastic’, ‘wow’. Telling this story is used to demonstrate how their campaign is being evaluated, and shows what meaning to give to their lobbying and the London Ambitions campaign, given how others talk about that work. The staff member offers an understated assessment of the story as a ‘pretty good mention’. By guiding the group through a story, ordering a sequence of events into a reportable occurrence, the staff member shows how the group’s work is being realised.

On other occasions, the Senior Director explains efforts to apply pressure on government ministers. The following account does more than simply report that they are pursuing their shared cause. Indeed, the following account makes clear what arguments will be deployed on the occasion of any potential meeting and what they will be asking from the two ministers.

we’ve also written to Nick Boles and Sam Gyimah, um, on (behalf) of Jack, rather Jack signs- signed the letter, because what we’d quite like to do is to go to speak to Sam and speak to Nick to say, look, we’re aware that there are some difficult issues around careers, we are deadly serious that we got to do something about this in London, we can no longer afford to have youth unemployment still three times the- the height of- the other, the normal unemployment rate, and just to- to really bring them on board in terms of this is what London intends to do.

Each of these examples of talk by members of staff which details work undertaken by the Senior Director and other staff, showing the group what is happening with their concerns. These are reportable matters. Each occasion puts their lobbying work on display shows what response they have, or can expect to, receive from the staff members’ work.

### 7.3 *'A piece of work to be done'*

During meetings, members of the board also formulate 'pieces of work' that staff and each other should attend to as they move forward. In making these statements, members of staff and the group oriented towards establishing what future actions the group should take. These 'pieces of work' involve pulling together fragmentary details about actions that may need to be taken on matters of mutual concern, relating this piece of work to an event, a document, a letter, a report, a consultation, a public statement, a data release, a set of specifications, a funding bid, a guidance for providers, a change in position, an evidence session at an APPG, a research project, a meeting, a conference. Members also ask whether they 'can get some data' on a topic, or propose 'the kind of data' that would be useful in making an argument. This requires that members and staff show their knowledge of settings, or 'spaces of lobbying', in which to conduct their advocacy efforts (Hofman and Aalbers 2017). This involves knowledge of how to articulate lobbying efforts in written submissions to parliamentary inquiries, at policy events, university research symposiums, news, print, social and broadcast media, annual conferences, industry conferences, governmental department steering groups, government departments' expert advisory groups, local practitioner networks, trade publications, company websites, user group meetings, think tank public events, hustings during mayoral electoral campaigns.<sup>7</sup>

This does not mean subsuming the group's activities into adherence to or departure from a set of 'norms' in conducting lobbying (Scott 2014). Instead it involves attending to how members and staff formulate how and what their work can be said to be about. In the following example, the Chair of the board identifies the need for one such a 'piece of work'.

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<sup>7</sup> Contrary to expectation, no mention was made of any events hosted by political party or Annual Party Conferences during the meetings. There was no discussion of plans that the group had to appear at, book advertising space, set up meetings, or otherwise, at these events. This works against the thesis presented by Harris and Harris (2005) on the increasing importance of Annual Party Conferences from 1997 onwards.

The Chair sketches out a piece of work on the availability of training provision and, what we might call, the mobility of learners.

‘and there is a, uh, you know, a piece of work to be done, that looks at, where the best specialisms lie, not just in terms of the institution, but also in terms of the location of the institution, that’s the point that Frank’s making, because if somebody wants to learn about, construction let’s say, and they’re living down in Croydon, they might find it quite hard, to make their way to, you know, Southgate, or Tottenham, or something like that’

The chair formulates what the group might want to do together with a ‘piece of work’. He sketches a proposal about a noticeable fact that the group could then treat as an issue to work on. How they will develop a position on this topic is to be found in what actions they can take. And the group have options, they are not limited to producing a written research report or a journal article. So what interventions can they make?

Given that each member of the group can formulate what ‘pieces of work’ the group can take up, the group’s lobbying efforts depends upon identifying what work they should move ahead with. Board and staff members’ contributions to the meeting can be seen as treating the group’s lobbying priorities accountable over the course of their meetings. Following Baumgartner *et al* (2009), it has been well-acknowledged that there are a diverse mixture of skills and competencies used in lobbying. These skills and competencies are supported by, in Schutz and Luckmann’s terms, a ‘stock of knowledge’ (1973). These skills, competencies and knowledge have also been analysed in terms of the ‘expertise’ that lobbyists use. Goodwin and others have described three types of lobbying expertise: substantive, process, people (see a fuller description of these ‘types of expertise’ in Godwin *et. al*’s appendix, ‘So you want to be a lobbyist?’ 2013: 215-226). Other publications offer sets of ‘how to guides’ and can be further consulted for typifications, instructions on how to

strategically engage with the full range of governmental officials and bodies, and instructions for lobbyists and public affairs professionals (Zetter 2008).

The formulations of ‘pieces of work’ are present and future orientated. They are describe in ways that treat them as relevant to the formation of government policy and proposed legislative changes that are already underway in the form of public consultations or review processes. In order to participation in or study how these members identify and formulate what actions the group should take with these pieces of work, it is necessary to be able to already be knowledgeable about ‘policy landscapes’ so as to see the relevance to taking any one course of action. In the following transcript extract, the member of staff describes a process already underway. The extract portrays her efforts to guide the future work of ‘serious, London based educational researchers’. This initiative involves advocating for this group to commit to a course of action.

I’ve been talking to Anne and Ken about whether what we should actually do is initially is bring all the serious, London based educational researchers together, in a symposium, and say look we know you all run around and get a grant for this a grant for that and a grant for the other, I think genuinely, we need to sit all the London educational researchers down and say, I think we need to over the next five years have a proper vision and a set of objectives in terms of what we want to actually want, strategically to do, through educational research in London

Without recognising that in-house lobbyists, public affairs professionals, and staff working for membership organisations attempt to work alongside and influence researchers, the member of staff’s description about this piece of work would seem inapposite. Establishing these working relations with researchers at a symposium is distinguished from partnering in efforts with other parts of London government in the following extract. In this extract the member of staff is describing the ‘bottom of the document’ which is being used to promote an annual careers event, Skills London.



you see at the bottom of the document that it is it is supported by London Councils, Mayor of London, and London Enterprise Panel, that doesn't work so well when we're trying to communicate this to teachers and to young people, so that's why we've branded it like particularly for Skills London

In describing how the careers event has been 'branded', the member of staff shows that the group and London local government are still represented on the document. The reasons for the event being branded in this way are also specified as 'that doesn't work so well'. This acknowledges how a communication strategy should be tailored to the specific categories of people who will be attending the event. And yet, she describes that teachers who will note these 'supporters' and recognise, as she phrases it, 'a pretty serious engine driving the whole thing forward'.

teachers talk about who's supporting it, because clearly, London Councils, Mayor's Office and LEP, that's a pretty serious engine driving the whole thing forward, so that's what we're doing for Skills London

Members of staff acknowledge the ongoing support of other London local authorities in these efforts. This extends to occasions when the group's campaign on careers advice provision, 'London Ambition'. The next quote gives evidence of how this campaign has received support by citing 'the Mayor waving London Ambitions around in the air' (see Figure 7.3).

we had the official launch of London Ambitions at the end of June, this year, uh, to much fanfare, and s- the Mayor waving London Ambitions around in the air, which was great fun actually

Again, the member of staff can group together a list of three government and quasi-government bodies to describe shared efforts. This list of bodies is condensed to be described as a 'fairly significant leadership engine'. In seeing this engine's shared efforts, the member of staff commends that the group use this 'an extraordinarily successful joint venture'.

I think we want to take advantage and harness the fact that this has been an extraordinarily successful joint venture between London Councils, the London Enterprise Panel and the Mayor's Office, and that's a fairly significant leadership engine behind something that's going on in London

Then there are ways that staff note future occasions where their lobbying efforts can be made. This involves knowledge of electoral cycles, how they can lobby mayoral candidates, and what documentary practices can be used to do this work. This shows what kind of object the group can 'put in front of the new mayor, our manifesto'.

certainly, as ( ) at the beginning of next year have been a particular opportunity to put in front of the new mayor, um, our manifesto, and I think that there is a lot of commonality in what's sort of been sort of said here, and it would be, a pity to miss that opportunity

For staff and members of the board, this involves telling the group how already planned events are relevant to the group's potential lobbying efforts. Telling the group about, and characterising these efforts – 'a sort of mayor debate, a hustings type thing' – also means specifying what they plan to do at this event.

we're going to be running a sort of mayor debate, a hustings type thing where we'll be saying, so ( ) what's your thinking on- on this



*Figure 7.3:* Screenshot of video promoting the launch of London Council's London Ambitions report on careers guidance. Event held at City Hall, London. Title of video: 'Boris Johnson launches London Ambitions with Primary Futures – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2015'; link: <http://bit.ly/2qKWajX>; accessed May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

In the back and forth between members and staff, how the group should ask questions of mayoral candidates is under question. This means attending to the production of public statements, and specifying what form that statement should take and what the group will do with this statement.

actually, why not have a, just a very clear statement, of what we- an outcomes focused statement, what we're looking to achieve for young people, and then say, we will use that, to challenge Mayor candidates, and we will use it to inform our skills review

Members of staff also provide cues to members about what they should be expecting in terms of governmental policy. Staff describe what members can reasonably anticipate in terms of desired changes to governmental decisions. This involves showing that there is some lobbying efforts are 'going on'. Given these lobbying efforts, staff can relay what members should expect in coming years. This casts the members of staff's efforts to commit the government to a course of action that is a demonstrable improvement from the perspective of members. The member of staff shows that they are working on behalf of the group. This involves, a member of staff shows, 'putting my London Councils hat on'. This formulates the group's claims in monetary terms.

so, those conversations are definitely going on, this- uh, I'll be completely frank, there's clearly nothing we're going to be able to do for sixteen seventeen academic year but what we're trying really hard to do is to lobby and get this, if not right for seventeen eighteen, at least a lot better, for seventeen eighteen, I think on the careers side, whilst I know I'm probably just saying it a little bit tongue in cheek, the Careers and Enterprise Company does have twenty million pounds of our money, and we want some of it back

When members and staff formulate claims about what work they should focus on, this also requires formulating 'what we should be arguing'. Members show how these claims should

be tied to specific pieces of evidence and reasoning which casts doubt on what the government ‘seems to recognise’. What seems obvious to members, this claim goes, does not seem obvious to government. In getting what-seems-obvious to be recognised by government, members need to formulate how these points should be taken up by the group. In this next extract this is formulated in terms of the group agreeing to a ‘lobbying priority for the year’.

um do we want to uh just thinking about you know that, do we want to priority, a lobbying priority for the year to be arguing for post-sixteen funding to be secured, I mean I don’t understand why you ring fence five to sixteen and I don’t know why you don’t look down to one to two years to the end of education, I don’t know why we don’t do that, it’s very blinkered I, think, it’s the same person that actually investing in, will pay dividends later on, but, maybe, the government, doesn’t seem to recognise that but I mean, as a lobbying position, and with concerns about post-sixteen education it seems to me that we should be arguing, in some way shape or form, shouldn’t we

Each of these formulations about what the group should be doing accounts for their prospective work. Members and staff produce these formulations which gloss what is going to happen on a policy issue, what they could or should be doing, what they may want to do, and what, in short ‘pieces of work’ they should focus upon. In attending to these formulations, members gloss how their efforts can contribute to ‘policy shaping’ and ‘legislation shaping’ (Zetter 2008). The next section turns to describe how members and staff formulate and address ‘issues and concerns’ within meetings.

#### *7.4 Formulating Issues and Concerns*

Studies of lobbying and strategic leadership need to attend to the way that members and staff use language to display how ‘issues and concerns’ are raised. Such a focus can contribute to a

literature on the way that political talk is produced in institutional settings (Heritage and Clayman 2010). Such an approach can also draw upon an existing literature in studies of Institutional Talk about how services are sought within sequences of talk. Emily Hofstetter (2016: 59-90) has described how constituents ‘build a case for aid’ when talking the parliamentarians in constituency offices. Such considerations can be used to inform our purpose in the present chapter. In this way, a focus on how members talk about their ‘issues and concerns’, and what staff do to address these issues, can be used as the basis of analysing how lobbying is undertaken through producing sequences of actions that involve recognising how members’ formulate issues and concerns.

In drawing on such sources, the following final section offers up suggestions about how to further investigation the ‘missing interaction what’ in studying lobbying. This ‘missing what’ is identified in ethnomethodological studies of work as curiously absent from accounts which provide general, formal theories of professions and occupations. These theories do not attend to, nor do they attempt to attend to, the situated practices of doing specific work, whether common-sense or professional, and so on. The approach taken up in this section contrasts with attempts to provide general theories about lobbying as a social activity, as ‘legislative subsidy’ (Hall and Deafhoff 2006). The claim that lobbying involves information, intelligence and labour need not be disputed. The following section provides a set of examples that detail the practices that staff and board members use to account for and coordinated their activities. These activities involve identifying what issues and concerns need to be worked on.

The first example highlights delays to a funding bid submitted to the European Social Fund (ESF) bid submitted. The member of staff (S1), in charge of the ‘External Funding’ stream of work, is explaining to the group what is known about the delays. As one of the board members is absent, the member of staff speaks on their behalf. The staff member marks

this absence by stating that ‘it’s a pity that Vic isn’t here’. He then offers an account of what this member may have said about this issue. The fact that the member of staff can safely assume what concerns the absent member may have expressed exhibits how the absent member and member of staff have a shared understanding over how to relay concerns about these delays.

### Transcript L

(M1: board member; S1: staff member; Ch: Chair)

S1: It’s um, a consell- it’s the predicted consequences of a delay in the tendering process

Ch: Right=

S1: =This late in the twenty fourteen to twenty ESF round, uhhm, we were concerned about the possible consequences on the, supply chain, and on the provider base, caused by the uh, the- the- the delays, it’s a pity that Vic isn’t here, because I’m sure he would, um reiterate the posi- the- the fears that (we have) long expressed about the delays, um, and and simply, it means that because of the lack of funding, (the) number of providers in the system that could submit bids, was very much reduced

?: mm

S1: And because there- the- there aren’t the suppl- the suppliers to submit bids, there are far fewer bids than there have been in previous tender rounds

The staff member describes concerns over this process by speaking on behalf of an absent member. This relies upon an account that has already been discussed within the group, one that ‘we have long expressed’. The staff member indicates that *what Vic would say* is predictable and expected. The ongoing delays means that the staff members’ reiteration of these concerns can be done by citing previously expressed comments, and attributing them to the absent member that were expected to express such concerns. The member of staff takes Vic’s place to speak about how these concerned would have been expressed. When those members are absent, staff members are expected to step in and ‘speak on behalf’ of absent members on those topics.

In the next example one of the Board members describes the reason for a state of affairs: ‘because it’s systemic’. He then formulates a gloss on the issue he is describing: ‘we’ve got a kind of a pass the parcel really’. This is then related to producing a three-part listed series of educational institutions: primary school, secondary school, Further Education, or ‘FE’ (Jefferson 1990). Is this account of ‘the system’ incomplete given that there are representatives of Higher Education and work-based learning providers also around the table? Instead of attempting to encompass all of the board members’ concerns, the description of a ‘pass the parcel’ involves formulating an issue. The issue is also raised as a complaint about the treatment of FE providers who, as one board members says, are ‘berated’ (Schegloff 2005).

### **Transcript M**

(S1: staff member; M1-2: board members)

- M1: And its, sorry, ( ) because it’s systemic  
 ??: mm  
 M1: Because one of the issues is we’ve got a kind of a pass the parcel really, from primary school to secondary school  
 ??: (mm mm)  
 M1: And then we’ll all say secondary school (are) doing really well, but the forty percent, are not [getting (five GCSEs) at=  
 S1: [Not- exactly  
 M1: =Sixteen, they’re passed to FE=  
 M2: (No exactly, exactly, yeah)  
 M1: =Frankly cos we’re- and then- then FE is then berated, for dealing with- often these young people who haven’t done well, we’ve got to turn that on its head really, we’ve got to start rewarding, organisations that are looking, for- because it’s tough work, working with young people who haven’t got those, GCSEs (in Maths and English), and at the moment we berate providers who trying to do stuff with (that)  
 S1: And absolutely, we haven’t even touched upon the pressure that this actually puts schools under, [cos I’m looking at Arwel  
 M1: [Yeah  
 M2: As Frank says we’ve done very well getting people over the lines



The member of staff seems to move to build on the board members' turn and provides an assessment token: 'and absolutely'. The member of staff exhibits that the following talk will expand upon the prior turn. The staff member's turn displays a feature of lobbying work. The turn shows how the staff member convenes the group's discussions by relating topics towards other members within the group. The staff member can be seen to nominate the topic of 'schools' and subsequently Arwel begins to speak on the topic of 'schools'. The staff member identifies that the topic has not been exhausted in the act of selecting the next speaker, and does little to expand upon the board members' complaint. The staff member displays that the topic needs additional consideration. She narrates who should offer these considerations. The staff member's turn also marks the board members' account as partial: 'we haven't even touched upon'. The staff member nominates next speaker to orientate to the topic, introducing the following account as concerned with 'the pressure that this actually puts school under'. The staff member identifies *who* should speak on this topic through gaze, selecting next speaker, nominating the topic of the next turn, given the staff members knowledge of *who* is appropriate to speak on that topic.

The next example involves a member of staff explaining how issues and concerns can be raised and dealt with in the future. In this case a member of the Operational Sub-Group (OSG) asks about the circumstances in which funds from a technical assistance bid can be used. The member indicates their shared awareness and hints at frustration with ongoing delays in securing this funding. He says, 'whenever this program may start'. Their question then provides a hypothetical future date when members may want to raise issues and relay concerns: 'twelve months down the line'. The member offers a hypothetical future scenario to ask a member of staff about the criteria for appropriately using the funds.

## Transcript N

(S1: staff member; M1-2: OSG members)

- M1: would that- would that work um allow you to, let's say for example, whenever this program may start [(*laughing*)]  
M1: Let's say, put ourselves twelve months down the line (*laughing*)  
M2: Don't be, I-  
M1: Yeah, no I'm sure it will, and I've got complete confidence that we'll have six months to spend twenty five million pounds again, but let's put ourselves twelve months down the line and say for example a- an organisation is successful to, um deliver, part of a program, in say, the growth cluster area, and as local authorities, we have some concerns about the way that it's delivered, would that technical assistance bid allow, you to put together all the, particular partners to try to resolve the issue  
S1: Yes it wou[ld]  
M1: [mm]  
S1: Um, essentially what we're talking about is- is- is- a- two forms of networking in- in one event

That the member of staff is able to follow the details of the hypothetical case shows a shared understanding of the ways that issues and concerns are raised and dealt with. The OSG member (M1) uses a generic example to find out what the 'technical assistance bid' would allow for. In formulating this generic case, the staff member is expected to understand that the OSG member is asking a hypothetical question. These terms allow for a case in which no specific referents need be introduced. Indeed, the example resembles a theoretical account about 'service delivery' by typifying the relations between organisations, growth cluster areas, concerns, programs, local authorities, particular partners and issues. The staff member is expected to follow this theoretical account and ascertain whether it is a candidate case of: the kind of circumstance that arises during 'service delivery'; and a candidate for legitimately requesting 'technical assistance bid' funds. The staff member seems to recognise the hypothetical albeit generic concern as legitimate.

The next example also involves the use of a hypothetical formulation. A member raises an issue about their comprehension of normal reporting procedures. In this example, a

member of the Operational Sub-Group asked a question about the procedure for reporting that members should follow. The question comes after the group have been discussing proposals for restructuring 'Task and Finish' groups, where one member of staff indicated the need to consider how these groups could be 'accountable'. In the preceding discussion, members were invited to offer comments on written plans for the Task and Finish groups that support the board's activities, and what areas of work these groups would take on. At this stage in the discussion, two proposed plans have been approved of by the group. These proposals will then be taken to a Leaders' Forum for final approval in the coming weeks.

Transcript 'O' shows this staff member attempting to make his contribution congruent with the prior topic of discussion whilst attempting to clarify his understanding about the activities of the group. This issue may well not merit mention as 'major' or 'systemic' issue. Indeed, it is unlikely to appear in the minutes of any meeting. Yet it does concern how the rules of operation for this group should apply. The member introduces his question by relating it to the preceding discussion through an initial request that attempts to display the topical relevance of the question, 'can I ask a related question to that (and) clusters'. The OSG member identifies an issue concerning what he should do given the existing structure of the group. The questioner's initially attempt to clarify what the normal procedure should be for 'reporting back' to an 'area of London' is not immediately understood. The subsequent troubles in comprehension multiply up until the member of staff offers clarification.

### **Transcript O**

(S1: staff member; M1-2: OSG members)

M1: Can I ask a related question to that (and) clusters, the other five clusters, um, what is now the relationship between this group and representation back, reporting back to, an area of London

S1: That's where Peter's comment about accountability fits in, so depending on what Forum recommends on Wednesday, we'd have to think

through [what the accountability looks like  
M1: [But if I, ( ) okay, if I'm- if I'm now ( ) if I'm (I'm invited to) this meeting=  
S1: =mm=  
M1: =Where do I take the intelligence from this meeting back to, who do I take it back to, who am I reporting back to from this meeting now  
M2: What, back to your cluster do you mean=  
S1: =Back to your cluster=  
M1: =Yeah, so is that cluster those, which- which cluster (*laughing*) Sorry, I just  
S1: Right, we're using- we're using the ESF clus[ters as=  
M1: [Clusters right  
S1: =A proxy for cluste[rs, in this gro[up  
M1: [okay [okay  
S1: =Mind of course that we're gonna end up with slightly different clusters for other things but just to try to keep things as simple as possible from an OSG perspective, it's the ESF clusters=  
M1: =right okay=

Clearly the staff member initially misunderstands what the member is attempting to ascertain. In the course of orientating to the question as if it were still on the same topic of the Task and Finish groups, the staff member offers an answer by reiterating 'Peter's comment about accountability'. The member overlaps this attempted answer and moves to show that his question needs to be reformulated. The member then uses a hypothetical example to solicit directions about the reporting of the group's work: 'if I'm (invited to) this meeting [...] where do I take the intelligence'. It is an interesting question considering that the member is already invited, and present, at this meeting. We may also comment that the use of this device is not entirely successful. Another member and the staff member then move to clarify what is being asked: 'back to your cluster do you mean?' Initially there was trouble in a members' understanding of what the reporting procedure should be, and then, subsequently, there was trouble in understanding the question about reporting procedures. Both present practical problems to staff and OSG members. The fact that there seems to be clarity over the issue does not exhaust the potential for confusion. Once the member has demonstrated

understanding that the ‘ESF clusters’ are being used as ‘proxies’, the member of staff moves to close the topic. This is done by introducing a future consideration about how this reporting procedure will come to change. The staff member backtracks, reiterates the answer, and then offers an instruction to ‘try to keep things as simple as possible’, as another adage for lobbying work. The member of staff and OSG member have settled the issue by offering an answer that relies upon the members’ knowledge of other groupings of London local authorities, the ‘ESF clusters’.

This last example provides a richly detailed case with which to describe how the group orientate towards identifying and solving issues. As briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, the group has a working relationship with the London Enterprise Panel (LEP). The membership of the London Councils board overlapped with the LEP. Members of staff and board members sat on both bodies. Our focus in this chapter is on how staff talk about this relation, thereby contracting to the way that LEP, localism and city-regional governance had been described in urban studies (see, Clark and Cochrane 2013; Cochrane 2012, Etherington and Jones 2016, Jackson *et al* 2013, Pike *et al* 2012, Pike *et al* 2015, Pugalís and Bentley 2013). As some members of staff and the board have positions on both the YPES board and one of the LEP’s ‘working groups’, namely the ‘Skills and Employment Working Group’ (disbanded following the 2016 London Mayoral election), the following discussion involves the group identifying how issues with the previously mentioned European Social Fund (ESF) can be addressed.

These examples provide a case with which to consider how members identify and formulate a ‘strategy’ to act upon a ‘collection of issues’ noticed during the course of Board meeting. In the extract the Chair initially describes how this collection is a shared problem. As a problem, each instance is treated as sharing properties and indicative of a ‘broader issue’ that need be addressed. If only one issue had been identified, it is arguable that that issue

would not be treated as ‘an example of’ but as an isolated incident, requiring a different response. The fact that the Chair identifies three examples means that the ‘issues’ are able to be reasonably treated as different phenomenon. The ensuing exchange displays how the group orientate to this ‘bigger issue’ by accounting for what work and action needs to take place.

### Transcript P

(Ch: Chair; M1: board member; S1: staff member; VC: Vice Chair)

- Ch: Well it’s problematic I mean I think, yeah I don’t know if there’s something that we do need to take back as a LEP, as a bigger issue, because then there’s something like three examples of where programs have been delayed and jeopardised because of delays in ESF funding, we (should), it can’t be right, can it
- M1: We should do shouldn’t we
- S1: Can I- yeah, can I make a suggestion, Peter has also been pushing, we are waiting to find out who has bid for what in what contract package areas etcetera, once we’ve got some more detailed information, what I’ll ask Peter to do is to just put a short written brief together
- Ch: Yes please
- S1: [And email you so you’ve got that information straight away and then obviously we’ll make sure that we stay completely tied into, the fact obviously, with the LEP, the Skills and Employment Working Group, and the- the governance group that Mary is sitting on as well, just so that, so you’re all getting that information as soon as we know, that information
- Ch: Yeah
- S1: Okay
- VC: But we’ve got (a LEP) meeting on the ninth of March is it
- Ch: Yeah
- ?: (Yeah)
- VC: Do we need to [flag this up
- Ch: [flag it up
- S1: Well we’ll pull together what we have=
- VC: =cos there is gonna be this whole time lag with all this isn’t it
- M2: Cos it’s just gone quiet
- VC: Yeah
- M3: I saw the delay with the career clusters and we’ve heard nothing since
- S1: Yeah I know
- M4: After substantial delays
- S1: Well why don’t we pull together something for- we- we- can pull together what we’ve got, so you’ve got that ready for the LEP meeting

The extract seems to involve a couple of attempts by the staff member (S1), Chair (Ch) and Vice-Chair (VC) to formulate what action the group should take so as to close the topic. How these parties work on formulating what to do about the 'bigger issue' is achieved through granting due consideration to the proposed means by which the issue will be raised in another setting, what action the team will take, and the future exchange of information. However, proposing what this action should be is not immediately available.

In the first instance, the staff member begins their turn by formulating a request: 'can I- yeah, can I make a suggestion'. This move displays caution about making the following contribution to the discussion. The partial repair of 'can I- yeah' also indicates alignment with the Chair and board members' (M1) preceding turns. There is no noticeable pause to await a response to the request (although video records may suggest the use of gaze and bodily orientation offering a 'go ahead'). The staff member's opening indicates that the following talk will *make a suggestion about what to do about the preceding topic and 'broader issue'*. It is noticeable that the next component of the staff members turn does not involve the formulation of a 'suggestion'. Instead the staff member accounts for the team's activity and only then moves to formulate what work they will henceforth undertake. This involves an account about what they have been doing, starting off with, 'Peter has also been pushing, we are waiting to find out'. The member of staff then commits another member of the team, Peter, to prepare a 'short written brief'. The staff member also offers assurance that they will act to address the situation: 'and then obviously we'll make sure that we stay completely tied into, the fact obviously, with the LEP'. There are two clear commitments that the staff will distribute information, 'so you're got that information straight away' and 'so you've all getting that information as soon as we know'. At the end of the staff member's turn, their 'suggestion' has involved an action that differs from a prescription about how the

Chair or other board members should act. Instead, the turn itemised what actions the staff has and will take to address the identified issues.

The second phase of this extract involves the identification of a problem in preceding staff member's 'suggestion'. This problem is subtly identified in a series of turns by the Vice Chair (VC). This move seems to suggest that the preceding account is not adequate to deal with the 'broader issue'. This is done by drawing upon knowledge about the dates of the LEP's upcoming meeting. The turn suggests an objection to the logical basis for the prior account of how the lobbying should be done. It does this through seeming to verify the date of the next LEP meeting. Once this date has been confirmed, the Vice Chair follows up with a question that is completed by the Chair: 'do we need to, flag this up'. The member of staff offers a new suggestion which is interrupted by the Vice Chair moving to provide reasoning for the preceding questions. This reasoning indicates that the group should 'flag up' the issue at the next meeting and prevent 'this whole time lag'. The staff member's second attempt to close the topic adjusts the previous assurances and commitments in light of the new plan. It demonstrates recognition and understanding of what work should be undertaken to support the board's activities given that the Chair and Vice-Chair plan to *flag the issue up*. This work is glossed as 'pull together something' and 'pull together what we've got'.

## 7.5 Conclusion

This final analytic chapter has examined how 'NEET to EET' transitions are organised in regards to the work of lobbying and advocating for changes to education and skills policy and governmental regulation. In the discussions at London Councils, members talk about educational and training provision in regards to funding formulas, regional variation in examination results, the issuance of new guidance by a regulatory agency, report on efforts to



persuade government ministers to adopt their plan for careers education provision, and so on. The chapter examined the way that lobbying was conducted through providing examples about the way that members formulated the ‘pieces of work’ that constituted their practical activities. These pieces of work focused on how to organise the group’s actions on issues and concerns associated with education and training provision. In this sense, intervention work was displayed through the deliberating about relevant considerations for producing such pieces of work. This may involve: what policy and regulatory processes are currently underway that they should seek to influence; how staff should spend time on what issues; whether ministers or senior government officials made public comments that indicate a shift in policy or reveal their future intentions; what is the timeline for future decisions by government departments, funding agencies, commissioning bodies; what forums can members appear at the present their campaigning efforts; how the group should publicise their work, and so on. In describing how these deliberations are interactionally organised, the chapter has sought to contribute to an understanding about how interest groups arrive at decision as well as indicating the practical skills that lobbyists use to support members in formulating how to pursue public affairs strategies.

The chapter indicated that the methods that members use to produce intervention work was not solely concerned with working directly with young people but on sectoral challenges and regional provision which was being effected by changes to government policy. Staff sought to make sense of these changes through coordinating their activities through producing pieces of work which should focus their shared attention. Many of these pieces of work involved the production of documents or reports – such as vision statements, work plans, development plans, annual statements of priorities, board constitution, looped papers, constitutional papers, the agenda, short written briefs, five-year implementation plans, a response to governmental consultation. The specific complement of skills that members

displayed in deliberating about what to conduct lobbying, advocacy and campaigning efforts on, clearly involved a mixture of professional and common-sense knowledge, an ability to discuss various competing claims about the strategy for organising shared efforts on issues and concerns, being able to reason about what appropriate courses of action to take that could actively addressed matters of shared concern, being seen to listen to the concerns and issues raised by members that lobbying represent.

Having sought to provide a closely detailed analysis of the practical work involved in these case studies presented in these four analytic chapters, we now turn to the conclusion where we return to our initial point of departure about investigating the organisation of ‘NEET to EET’ transitions. We seek to summarise the praxeological respecification that this thesis has attempted to detail on the organisation of ‘NEET to EET’ transitions. In this way we look to outline how studying the intervention work of professionals concerned with young people’s transitions into education, employment and training can be conducted through examining the interactional organisation of this work. The thesis offers some limitations of taking such an approach and make suggestions about the potential for developing a set of research initiatives associated with ethnomethodological studies of work practices.

## **EIGHT. Conclusion**

The thesis has sought to describe how practitioners and professionals address the topic of NEET through everyday work practices. It has explored this topic by describing how professionals and practitioners organise activities which move young people ‘from NEET to EET’. The thesis has provided materials with which to address contemporary sociological and social policy debates on the topic of NEETs, unemployment and active labour market policies through ethnomethodological studies of work practices. Such debates have tended to focus upon whether unemployment should be addressed through supply or demand-side policies, whether the responsibility for periods of unemployment lies with individuals and their motivation to find employment or in structural conditions that are characterised by the growth of low-paid and insecure employment due to neoliberal reforms and government austerity programs, or the hollowing out of a social state which has results in a reduced scope for welfare professionals to provide humane support for recipients of employment services. Each of the four analytic chapters have each offered detailed case studies which contribute to such debates through a detailed account about how professional work practices contribute to how interventions into NEETs are accomplished.

The thesis has described ethnographic fieldwork in ‘perspicuous settings’ with employment related support professionals, local authority youth service staff and volunteers, data officers and NEET tracking teams, and members of lobbying and advocacy groups. Each

of these settings provided materials with which to re-specify the practical basis for the organisation of 'NEET to EET' transitions. This re-specification involves identifying the practices through which a topic is a 'locally achieved phenomena of order' (Garfinkel 1991: 17) and how members made sense of local contingencies in the course of everyday work practice. In the course of re-specifying how NEET is treated a feature of ordinary activities and routine work of practitioners and professionals, the thesis has also offered materials with which to put sociological studies of professional groups and ethnomethodological studies of work and occupations into closer dialog. The ethnographic chapters have demonstrated the value of taking an ethnomethodological approach to studying those work practices associated with implementing NEET policies. In this way, future studies can also revisit familiar topics in sociological and social policy research to offer alternate descriptive accounts about the practices, skills and knowledge that members use to organise interventions in labour markets with target groups.

The thesis also offered a critique about how Dunn *et al* (2010, 2013, 2014, 2015) make use of social welfare professionals' accounts about the attitudes of jobseekers towards paid employment. The thesis has demonstrated that jobseekers' 'attitudes' also feature in the 'normal' and routine practical activities through which interventions into service groups are implemented by social welfare professionals and street level bureaucrats. Using these accounts as evidence of service users' dispositions without appreciation for the organisational contexts in which they are treated as relevant leads to analytic confusion over the epistemological status of accounts about these attitudes. The four analytic chapters have described the organisational relevancies of the category of 'NEETs' and how professionals describe their work with NEETs in everyday practices. This required focusing on accounting practices, 'shop talk', common-sense reasoning, the use of record-keeping tools, and the tacit knowledge and practical activities associated with following administrative procedure. This

stands in contrast to methodological approaches which analyse written testimonies and interview accounts as evidence for evaluating either dispositions of social groups or cohorts or the experience of service users.

In this way our focus on *intervention work* focused upon the practical activities, talk and conduct of members of staff, and sought to draw attention to the way that professional groups account for a social problem, that is ‘NEET to EET’ transitions. Addressing this involved an engagement with sociological and social policy literatures preoccupied with the implementation of active labour market policies, the role of street level bureaucrats in ‘actualising’ social policy programs through interactions at the front-lines of service delivery, and a program of research referred to as a ‘sociology of interventions’. The thesis has also shown that a program of research associated with a sociology of interventions can be given a meaningful basis through detailed description of the lived work of professionals and their mundane sense-making practices. Such a focus also seeks to speak to researchers interested in topics which intersect social policy research, organisational studies, public administration, the study of social problems, and youth studies, by focusing on how academic debates are already treated as the objects of inquiry by professional and occupational groups. Future research in this area could involve further observational study about the ways that interventions are implemented in organisational settings by other groups of practitioners, describing what these practitioners do to interact with and account for these social groups as service users and recipients of these interventions, and what activities, contingencies, issues and concerns do these practitioners orientate towards to in the course of making sense of interventions. Such an area of focus can be used to critically interrogate existing sociological and social policy literature on the role of social welfare professionals and service users in the ‘actualisation’ of policies through highlighting how professionals coordinate and account for their work in mundane practices, institutional products and situated action.

## 8.1 *Summary of thesis*

I began the thesis by describing how the research project set out to understand how professionals made sense of this NEET to EET transitions through situated activities, and indicated that there were ongoing debates about the how such work should be conducted by professionals and practitioners. The introduction included a quotation from a founding board member of the Institute of Employability Professionals who spoke about the difference between written ‘role profiles’ *on paper* and *in reality*. This thesis set out to provide examples of the interactional work and everyday practices through which members of staff made sense of NEET to EET transitions and the routine organisational activities that this involved. Through explaining the ‘normal, natural troubles’ that were dealt with in everyday practice, the thesis indicated some of the tacit skills, knowledge and resources that members use as competent practitioners. The thesis developed a research framework in which to observe and describe how practices and activities were undertaken in ‘perspicuous settings’. These settings provided occasions in which to observe how members of staff displayed their knowledge, skill and reasoning in order to make sense of how interventions should be organised. The focus of the study thereby sought to attend to the ways in which professionals accounted for their work and the ‘details of practice’ through which this work was accomplished (Rawls 2005). These accounting practices were treated as ‘members’ phenomenon’ and required the practical knowledge about how to produce intelligible, orderly and recognisable course of action and organisational activities.

The study set out to provide a descriptive, empirical and observation account which addresses issues raised in a number of sociological and social policy literatures: the relationship between labour market institutions, employment and welfare service professionals; the experience of young people as service users in public sector organisations and private delivery agencies; about how employment-related services and training provision

were delivered to urban youth; and, contemporary changes to the way in which street-level bureaucrats were expected to account for their activities through record-keeping requirements. The thesis then outlined a proposed research framework which brought together ethnomethodological studies of work and ethnography. In taking such an approach to the topic, the thesis set out to contribute to a corpus of studies referred to as ethnomethodological studies of work through participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork. A central interest in the Studies of Work tradition has been a focus on the ‘missing interactional what’ in sociological studies of professionals and occupational groups. This ‘missing interactional what’ involves explicating how professionals coordinate ordinary activities through situated reasoning in the course of shared workplace tasks. This initial research design also suggested that the subsequent chapters would offer ‘tutorial’ examples about how professionals coordinated their activities through courses of interaction. These tutorials would involve showing the reader how members of these made sense of how to conduct intervention work through their concerted activities. In order to be able to describe how these activities are undertaken, the ‘unique adequacy requirement’ means that researchers should have a ‘vulgar competence’, at the very least, with practitioners’ methods in order to be able to follow and participate in the activities being described. The methodology and subsequent analytic chapters described how and whether this ‘unique adequacy requirement’ of methods was met in the present studies. The methodology concluded by discussing the ethnographic tradition in sociological and anthropological research and the implications of conducting participant and non-participant observation with the four groups of professionals. This section also raised some issues about some of the limitations associated with using an ethnographic approach to collecting data about ‘naturally organised ordinary activities’. One main issue associated with such a data collection approach involved the limited availability of detailed documentation about the ‘lived details’ that

members orientate to when undertaking ordinary activities, as opposed to empirical studies that are primarily based upon a corpus of audio and video-recordings.

In Chapters Four and Five, this research framework was used to focus on practices associated with practitioners delivering NEET programs and projects in front-line service delivery. These chapters focused on the work of professionals and practitioners as they attended to delivering a wage-subsidy project and a traineeship program. The chapters drew from ethnographic fieldwork in two local authorities and with two teams of practitioners as they attended to routine activities associated with implementing these interventions. By doing so, the chapters aimed to explicate how practitioners undertook ordinary activities associated with implementing NEET interventions. In both of these chapters I look to explain how it is that members of staff made use of documentary practices, ‘shop talk’, storytelling, observations and reports about service users in order to make their work intelligible to each other. In this way, intervention work was achieved through knowledgeable usage of these practices. The chapters offered an analysis of how members of staff treated certain activities as ‘normal’ and certain activities as ‘troubling’ through showing how they account for these activities in relation to the identities of service users. This accounting was more varied than that specific in professional handbooks or service delivery guidance documents, and made use of common-sense and storytelling. This sense-making was used in the course of processing clients, registering clients, instructing staff on how to refer clients to other teams, referring clients, writing quarterly monitoring reports, delivering bad news about clients, team meetings, fielding phone calls, interviewing prospective trainees, filling out debriefing sheets, reading referral documents, organising a graduation ceremony, giving a description of a job role, liaising with social work professionals, and so on. The chapters sought to provide rich examples with which to show how staff members undertook these tasks through sense-making practices and organising ordinary activities.



The two subsequent chapters both provided further cases of how staff organised their activities to undertake intervention work. These two chapters focused on the activities of data officers, local authority youth service staff, directors of youth services, councillors, policy officers, strategic directors, and so on. Both of these chapters sought to re-specify how the topic of NEET is treated as a practical problem related to administrative data and government regulations. These chapters also sought to provide ethnographic details about two organisational settings which have not been much studied in the sociological and social policy literature focused on NEETs and youth unemployment. These settings provided scope to describe the mundane practices that members routinely use to collect and discuss statistical information about NEET groups, and the work of organising a lobbying group focused on young peoples' education and skills. The focus of the analysis was to describe how professionals orientated to their shared work through the production of social objects, that we referred to as 'institutional products'. Our analysis was led by an engagement with ethnomethodological studies preoccupied with the production of 'institutional products' through concerted action. These institutional products, in the words of Maynard and Clayman, 'reflect the interpretive work of professionals in the field, who assemble the particulars of any case according to their typifications of people, motives, and situations' (1991: 406). Our focus in these two chapters was to describe what professionals did in order to orientate towards the shared production of products such as documents, statistics, records, databases, management information, reports, public relations campaigns. The chapters provided examples and transcript extracts about how members orientated towards discussing how to produce these objects and the relevancies these object had in making sense of NEET to EET transitions.

## 8.2 *Main contributions of the thesis*

In setting out to conduct this research project I wanted to collect materials to answer initial research questions and end up with a well-evidenced ethnographic account about the everyday organisation of intervention programmes for NEET groups. In my original doctoral proposal, I had indicated that I wanted to study how youth unemployment interventions are delivered, thereby offering an alternative, interactional approach to studies which treat categories of persons and ‘target groups’ in social policy, such as NEETs. In this way I sought to address long-standing interest in social problems research about the institutional responses and professional practices. At that stage of the research I was looking to contribute a piece of research that would contribute to scholarship at the intersection of NEET and unemployment policy, and between ethnomethodology and ethnography. This thesis has suggested the limitations of social research that treats ‘the experience of’ participants in programmes, institutions and interventions and has indicated an alternate approach for conducting social research on this topic. By taking for granted many of the shared sense-making practices, ordinary activities, and how such interventions are routinely organised, such approaches risk conceptual confusion over the object of analysis and methodological limitations of analysing retrospective accounts which testify to participants’ experience of such interventions. The thesis has demonstrated the feasibility of conducting research into the social organisation of professional work that routinely deals with young people who are not in education, employment or training. It has done this by taking seriously the interactional, practical basis through which this work is undertaken.

After having reviewed existing literature on NEETs and social policy programmes designed to encourage NEETs into education and work, it seemed clear that very little attention had been paid to the routine, everyday organisation of these programmes. A majority of the attention in the empirical literature around NEETs seemed to focus upon the

way that programme participants evaluate these programmes, how these programmes should be designed so as to produce specific outcomes, how these outcomes should be measured, or how programme staff account for changes in social policy and their effects on the delivery of NEET interventions. Such approaches are able to develop formal models to estimate which young people are most ‘at risk of NEET’, report upon thematic categories of ‘experience’ but seems to overlook offering an empirical examination of the practical action and reasoning through which such programmes are organised on a routine basis. What I have tried to emphasise throughout the thesis is that such an orientation to social research results in a failure to account for the way that intervention programmes are structured by participants through shared sense-making methods for sequentially organising the ordinary activities which constitute intervention work. This thesis has contributed an ethnomethodological respecification of this topic by detailing how NEET programmes are organisationally accounted for and the ordinary activities through which NEET interventions are delivered.

I have aimed to do this by contributing to a corpus of ethnomethodological studies of work and opening up future lines of inquiry in this field. I have shown that research in this tradition can and *how* it can look to address so-called ‘substantive’ topics in sociology and social policy, namely those of unemployment, youth policy, youth service programme delivery, the ‘local’ delivery of ‘national policy agendas’, and the methodical practices through which such agendas are accounted, evidenced, documented and quantified.

As the practices through which these ordinary activities are organised seldom become the focus of other studies in this literature, such approaches to describing and analysing the implementation of NEET programmes tend to face considerable methodological issues. These issues stem from a failure to account for the practical basis through which NEET programmes are endogenously organised by participants and the organisational accounting practices for making sense of these programmes. In this way the study has contributed four

analytic chapters as examples of the way that social researchers can produce qualitative, ethnographic and ethnomethodologically-informed research which overcomes such an oversight. By doing this, the study has contributed a detailed, descriptive ethnographic account of what is entailed in working in and around the issue of practically implementing programmes focused on NEETs transitions.

### *8.3.1 The everyday work of delivery agencies*

Secondly, the thesis has contributed to research about the role of professionals in delivering state-funded programmes which seek to intervene in NEET groups, youth unemployment and youth labour markets. I have done this by focusing on contemporary debates about the changing role of the public employment, training and youth services, and the professionalization of the employability sector and ‘activation workers’. Chapter Two offered a summary of research about how public employment services have undergone structural changes through the introduction of conditionality, ‘work first’ and ‘workfare’ models of service delivery, with the introduction of market mechanisms for tendering public services to private contractors in the employment and skills training services sector. In this way the thesis has developed an alternate approach to the topic of NEET interventions by examining how groups of practitioners make sense of everyday work routines in the light of changes in the organisation of public employment training services, transformations of youth services and the provision of labour market interventions. It has done this by focusing on the interactional practices through which such services are routinely organised. I have also sought to address ongoing debates about the way that delivery agents organise the intelligibility of their work with NEET through making sense of their relation to state policies, the organisational context of street-level bureaucracies, professional work practices,

and the routine requirements of ‘on-the-ground’ delivery of intervention programmes for unemployed populations (Boland and Griffin 2015, Dubois 2010, Greer 2016). The thesis has contributed four chapters, each of which have praxiologically respecified substantive topics in this area of research. By doing so I have indicated the importance of studying the routine, organisational work that professionals undertake as ‘activation workers’ and the relevance of this for examining how NEET groups are orientated to as a problematic category of persons in social policy and state interventions. In taking this approach I have also suggested new areas that social researchers have yet to consider within sociological and social policy literatures. These areas can draw future attention to how activation workers organise the delivery of NEET interventions and the practical actions and reasoning used to organise these interventions. In this way the thesis has pointed to ways in which future research could examine the relevance of how ‘activation workers’ undertake practical actions, professional and common-sense reasoning.

The thesis also stands as a contribution towards demonstrating how ethnographic sociological research can be conducted at the intersection between sociology of work and organisations, social policy, youth transitions, youth studies, and the sociology of interventions. It has identified some relevant practical activities which can be examined in future studies of the social organisation of state bureaucracies and the way that agents within these bureaucracies work with young service users, clients and beneficiaries. By doing this the thesis has contributed materials drawn from ethnographic fieldwork which draws together seemingly divergent areas of research in work, employment and organisations. In doing so I have brought together research materials collected through fieldwork in distinct institutional settings in order to address research in the sociology of youth unemployment and NEET groups. By drawing from materials gathered in the workplaces of different professional groups, I have described the importance of seeing the enactment of policy programmes as

involving a multiplicity of occupational roles and routine organisational work. I have suggested the importance of accounting for the ordinary activities through which members in occupational roles coordinate and concertedly organise their shared intervention work.

The thesis has also contributed to research that seek to interrogate how social policy research collects and analyses the ‘opinions’ and testimonial evidence from practitioners in welfare-to-work agencies. One strand of this research sets out to question the methodological grounds for treating the ‘opinions’ of frontline practitioners as uniquely ‘valid’, reliable and ‘more insightful’ testimony about the ‘lived realities’ of public service delivery. This has led some authors to suggest that only by considering the organizational contexts wherein frontline workers form their ‘opinions’, can researchers fully appreciate the basis upon which these opinions are formed (Jordan 2018). The thesis has contributed to this debate by instead suggesting that social policy researchers often fail to account for, not just an ‘organisational context’ for the formation of ‘opinions’, but the practical activities and competencies that frontline workers use to produce relevant and coherent ‘opinions’ as a feature of the ordinary activities involved in implementing programmes and policies.

In a related sense, the thesis has addressed this topic by highlighting one strand of social policy research in this tradition. The Introduction and Chapter One discussed Andrew Dunn’s research about the ‘attitudes’ and ‘behaviours’ of jobseekers (2010, 2013, 2014). I described that Dunn’s approach involved collecting and analysing the views of frontline service workers, i.e. ‘activation workers’, when talking about their experience with jobseekers in employment service agencies. The thesis has offered contrasting evidence about how ‘activation workers’ make sense of the identity of jobseekers, or in our case, clients on a wage-subsidy programme and trainees in a NEET traineeship program. This contrasting evidence suggests that views generated in research interviews miss the interactional and organisational context in which the ‘attitudes’ of jobseekers, or service recipients in welfare

agencies, are made sense of. I have sought to demonstrate the tenuousness of the claim that testimonies from frontline ‘activation workers’ can give researchers, as Dunn claims, a more ‘accurate’ account of the ‘work ethic’ or ‘choosiness’ of jobseekers. By doing this I sought to recast the relevance of studying these opinions as features of staff members’ work practices.

I have shown how Dunn’s approach fails to consider many of the organisational procedures that staff are required to use when accounting for and assessing individual jobseekers. Nor does Dunn’s approach consider the interactional practices through which professionals observe and discuss either the ‘attitude towards employment’ or the ‘work ethic’ of service users. Even by spending a small amount of time with frontline service staff, or ‘activation workers’, it becomes clear that the topic of ‘work ethic’ takes up a relatively a small amount of attention in their everyday practice. When it does so, staff members’ talk about client ‘attitudes’ do not resemble what Dunn suggests.

For example, in Chapter Three I discuss how staff were required to produce an intelligible, defensible account about whether clients were ‘gaining a work ethic’ by participating in the wage-subsidy project. In producing this written account, frontline staff described the ‘work ethic’ of their cohort of clients. ‘Work ethic’ was a predetermined category which staff used to account for this cohort’s attitudes. This category was devised by commissioning agents in order for staff to complete a mandatory quarterly monitoring report. This accounting category was used for this monitoring exercise, and became a resource with which to explain the performance of the wage subsidy team at this stage in the delivery of the project. In this way the category of ‘work ethic’ was a shared method with which to produce a written account and other data sources would be audited by the project commission, such as reports which detailed the quantified performance levels of ‘outcomes’ produced by staff and the delivery agency. The category of ‘work ethic’ was used by staff and the delivery agency to defend the performance levels to the commissioning agent. Staff justified their

performance levels – measured in terms of quantified ‘outcomes – by offering a narrative as an explanation for these levels. This explanation suggested that the problems that staff were experiencing was partly caused by the ‘work ethic’ of the client cohort. The explanation made sense of the contracted outcome levels by accounting for the ‘work ethic’ of the client cohort as a relevant observation, demonstrated through giving examples of specific cases. In this way, staff made sense of the category of ‘work ethic’ through a ‘local logic’ which was not derived from the application of a uniform system to measure a client’s work ethic. It was instead tied to staff members’ practices for producing an explanation about the delivery of a commissioned service contract. This is a very different basis for examining how staff made sense of jobseekers’ work ethic. To treat such an account as more ‘accurate’ or ‘insightful’ than jobseekers’ self-reported attitude towards work would be to ignore the situational relevance of this account and how the account used evidence to substantiate its claims for validity.

### *8.2.2 Ethnomethodology and studies of work*

Thirdly, the thesis has also contributed to a literature on ethnomethodology, namely to a corpus of research referred to as the studies of work, professions and occupations. Much of this literature has centered upon what Douglas MacBeth (2014) has recently referred to as ‘shop talk’. Recordings of such talk within workplaces has been used as empirical evidence with which to analyse professionals’ work practices. The thesis has indicated that there is more to consider than a single focus on the role that talk-in-interaction takes in the organisation of work settings. It has shown that the practices that members use to organise work settings are reflexively tied to the ordinary activities that constitute NEET interventions but also how these practices are not limited to talk-in-interaction. The thesis has instead



emphasised the importance of analysing an ‘occasioned corpus’ of practical knowledge, competencies, reasoning and action through which professional groups organise their worksite settings.

In doing so the thesis has added to the literature in ethnomethodological studies of work and suggested new areas for examination (Garfinkel 1986, Lynch forthcoming, Rouncefield and Tolmie 2011). The thesis has shown the kind of contribution that can be made by taking this praxiological orientation to topics in sociology and social research. Each of the four chapters have drawn from canonical studies in the ethnomethodological studies of work tradition, and demonstrated the relevance of this research to the new studies of workplaces, work practices and professional groups. The thesis offered four case studies as evidence of how to expand the studies of work tradition in new directions. This involves expanding this literature to examine work in settings outside of a focus on legal, medical, media, educational and other institutional settings. The thesis has suggested the possibility for social researchers to look again at what the ethnomethodological studies of work tradition offer to researchers interested in examination the social organisation of work and employment.

The thesis also laid down a marker about how such research can be conducted by opening up a renewed dialog with ethnomethodology, studies of work, and ethnography. As research in the studies of work tradition has slowed down in recent years, a substantial amount of scholarly attention and publication output has taken the form of studies of ‘talk-in-interaction’ and its relation to work practices. Whilst this is an understandable development both from a methodological and feasibility standpoint. Evidently, research in the field of conversation analysis is ‘growing’ and has had a demonstrable impact on sociology and related disciplines in the social sciences. Whilst acknowledging the opportunities offered by a strong community of researchers working in conversational analysis, the thesis has

demonstrated what more can be offered to a studies of work tradition by taking an approach which incorporates analyses of talk-in-interaction with ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation. (The area of ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography is an area which has received some, albeit sparse attention in the literature; for examples, see: Maynard 2003, Travers 2001).

In this way the thesis has contributed to literature in this area by developing the scope of ethnomethodological studies of work beyond the 'Talk at Work' paradigm prevalent within the literature on ethnomethodological conversation analysis. Research which draws from the 'Talk at Work' tradition has offered insightful examinations of, for example, the asymmetries of 'power' demonstrated in sequences of talk between professionals and service users. Instead of starting and ending with a focus on conversational practices, and the actions that are produced through the use of these practices, each of the chapters has drawn upon materials which emphasise: the relationship between the way that talk is used to constitute routine work tasks; how staff undertake other ordinary activities; and, how these ordinary activities relate to shared expectations about organisational accounting practices. In addition, the focus that I take to analysing transcripts of talk-in-interaction shows how analysing 'asymmetries' in sequences of interaction between professionals and service users does not begin to address the way in which interactions between professionals are relevant to the everyday organisation of intervention programmes. Indeed, I have sought to demonstrate the significance and potential research interest by examining how professionals talk between themselves in the course of organising work settings.

The thesis has also made four main contributions to the studies of work tradition in ethnomethodology by describing work practices undertaken by different professional groups and in different institutional settings all with a focus on one topic, NEETs. Each of these chapters provided further indications about how research in ethnomethodology can reassess

the ‘conventional’ ways in which sociological and social policy researchers approach the topics of NEETs, the distinct features of how ‘social problem workers’ conduct routine work tasks, the delivery of public services and the organisation of state interventions. Chapters Three and Six have also sought to address a topic in the ethnomethodological literature, namely the social organisation of statistics, case files, management information and bureaucratic record-keeping practices. Each of the findings chapters have offered new contributions about the way that organisational records and statistics are treated as the ‘institutional products’ of shared professional methods for accounting for workplace activities, and how they are produced with the expectation that they will be used by outside parties to inspect the fulfilment of institutional obligations.

Chapter Seven has addressed a previously unexplored professional and organisational setting in ethnomethodological studies: lobbying professionals and membership organisations. Neither of which seem to have been explored by ethnomethodologists and rarely explored by social science researchers interested in employment, education and skills provision. Basing my analysis on transcripts of both ‘board’ and ‘operational’ meetings, this chapter offered detailed analyses of the conversational practices through which lobbyists and clients made sense of the ‘objects’ of their work. This was examined by looking at sequences of interaction in order to detail what kind of ‘social objects’ could be studied in future sociological research on interest groups, advocacy groups, membership organisations and lobbying professionals.



To briefly return to the debate cited in the introduction. The thesis has suggested how further consideration should be paid to the practices through which professionals and practitioners when conducting research on *encounters* of state and citizens, *interactions* between providers and service users, and *implementation* of policies and legislation. The thesis has argued that sociologists and social policy research would benefit from more detailed analyses of the work practices and members' methods that these professionals and practitioners use to organise their activities. The thesis has thereby established some of the grounding upon which to begin to answer the question cited in the introduction: 'we have to ask why this is the case, why are so many work coaches not fulfilling the coaching elements of their job description'. Through describing how professionals and practitioners organise their activities and make sense of routine troubles encountered in their work, the thesis has suggested how the study of organisational practices – or as we have been calling it, *intervention work* – can provide a point of departure to understand 'NEET to EET' transitions.

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## Appendix I: Transcription Symbols

The thesis uses a limited set of transcription conventions established in conversation analytic studies of talk-in-interaction. I use the following set of transcription symbols, as described in more detail by other authors working in this tradition (see Schegloff 2007, 265-269; ten Have 1999, 213-214). I refrain from including the length of silence in transcripts, for example, as this falls outside the scope of the present inquiry.

[	-	pairs of square brackets used at the onset of overlapping speech
=	-	equals sign used at the end of speaker's turn to indicate that the following turn is latched
(.)	-	used to indicate a micro-pause within sequences of talk
<i>(laughing)</i>	-	italicised words in parentheses are used to indicate what other actions can be heard on the audio
(employer name)	-	non-italicised words in parentheses are used to anonymise the use of proper names within talk
( )	-	parentheses with no content indicate talk which is inaudible on audio-files
??	-	use of question marks to indicate that speaker cannot be identified on the audio-files